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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

MID-CAREER PERCEPTIONS OF MALE ADMINISTRATORS

BY

(C) Joseph F. MacEachern

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF MASTER OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and
recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
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MID-CAREER PERCEPTIONS OF MALE ADMINISTRATORS
submitted by Joseph F. MacEachern
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Education.

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Date: September 13/1990

DEDICATION

This thesis has been a work of tremendous personal worth and, hopefully, will be of value to others. To examine the phenomenon known as mid-life while one is actually experiencing the same, presents unique challenges. The successful completion of my thesis has had many contributors, none greater than my wife, Anne Marie, to whom I dedicate this work.

ABSTRACT

Reaching the halfway point (chronologically) of life has been the subject of much discussion in recent years. Phrases such as "mid-life crisis", "foolish forties", or "over the hill", have entered our vocabulary describing people who have reached that critical age where the years remaining may be fewer than those they have enjoyed.

This interpretive thesis explores the perceptions held by mid-career adult male educators between the ages of 35 and 50. A comparison was also undertaken between the administrators' perceptions and findings in literature. Data were gathered by interviewing six administrators in two Alberta separate school jurisdictions. As well, a search of literature was conducted to investigate current thinking.

Three major themes which emerged from the data were:Importance of time;In service of others and The need to talk. Time as a resource that must be wisely used during their remaining years took on special significance to mid-career administrators.The administrators also demonstrated a strong desire to continue to be of service to others even after they retired.There was also evidence that these administrators seldom had an opportunity to speak about themselves and their careers.

Other significant findings that emerged from the study were:

Administrators in this study had experiences during mid-life that were similar to those found by researchers who have investigated other professions.

Administrators often felt isolated from the decision-making process. There was also concern that the present educational system may not satisfy the aspirations of the new and highly skilled teachers emerging from the universities.

The practice of linking administrators' benefits to the size of the school was mentioned as an obstacle to career mobility and not in the best interests of education. There was also concern that school board policies were not consistently followed and that this was a major source of frustration.

All the administrators welcomed the opportunity to talk about their perceptions of themselves and their careers. Generally they were more optimistic than pessimistic about the future of education.They also believed strongly that more research in the area of adult development should be encouraged and that such research would have beneficial results for the profession.

Finally, this study supports and extends the findings of Levinson(1978) on mid-Career transitions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this work signifies not an end, but a new beginning. Before leaving my mid-life transitions behind, I wish to acknowledge a number of individuals who contributed to this thesis.

Dr. Margaret Haughey, my advisor, demonstrated at all times the patience, encouragement and support that made this work possible. My children, Danny, Anna and Patrick, silently (sometimes) accepted that Daddy wasn't always available because he was "working at the college". My very close friends, Florian, Andrea, Larry and Brenda gave continuing interest and support.

Finally, I acknowledge Allan, Bob, Charles, David, Eric and Frank, for their time and candor, which made the whole process possible.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Many researchers, (Erikson, 1968; Levinson, 1978; Sheehy, 1974 and 1981; and Gould,1978), believe that when people experience the onset of middle age, they enter an extremely important period of their adult development. With the realization that the years remaining may be fewer than the years already experienced, they become more reflective, more conscious of time, and generally more concerned about the future. For some it may be a period of regret over past failures or a wasted youth. Others may take the opportunity to plan for the future. Still others use the period to make a complete change of direction by entering new careers, returning to university or simply rejecting their present situations for goals or dreams that have been suppressed through their early adulthood.

For many, the arrival of mid-life can be both psychologically and physically stressful, which can have lasting results. Depression, loss of self-confidence and a general lowering of self-esteem are not uncommon at this stage. For them, the popular description by Gould (1978) of this period as "mid-life crisis" has special significance.

> In mid-life they can become pre-occupied with the topic of death for long periods of time, during which the deaths of friends or relatives around their age scare the hell out of them. They lose confidence in themselves and confuse their awareness of death with their situation at work. (p.230).

On the other hand, there are many who pass through this period without difficulty. Sheehy (1974) believed that the use of the word "crisis" was much too negative, as it signified calamity. Recognizing that many people never experience a "crisis", she preferred the term "passage". In her work, *Pathfinders* , Sheehy found:

> For those who face this major passage and make peace with themselves, the mid-forties can bring a strengthened sense of self and a refreshed sense of purpose, ushering in a stage of renewal in the fifties that can be the gateway to life's most confident and satisfying years. (p. 50).

Whether we call these transitional periods "crises" or "passages" is not significant at this point. What is important according to most writers in the field is the impact, both positive and negative, that these transitional periods have on the people who experience them.

Background to the Study

Daniel J. Levinson, a noted American psychologist, conducted extensive research in the field of male adult development between 1969 and 1973. His study of 40 middle-aged American men in various occupational positions has had significant impact on how we view the life cycle of adult men. In his book, *The Seasons of A Man's Life* (1978), Levinson, along with his co-workers in the study, Charlotte N. Darrow, Edward B. Klein, Maria H. Levinson and Braxton McKee, document and describe the lives of 40 male Americans selected from four occupational groups: executives, workers, novelists and biologists.

Levinson's principal conclusion is that adult men go through three distinct and relatively stable periods of adult development: Early Adulthood (age 22-40), Middle Adulthood (age 45-60) and Late Adulthood (age 65 and beyond). He also found that preceding these three periods a man also experiences a less stable period known as a transitional stage which lasts for approximately five years. These transitional periods are: The Early Adult Transition (age 17-22), The Mid-Life Transition (age 40-45) and The Late Adult Transition (age 60-65). While Levinson assigned specific ages to each period, he cautions that the time line for some men may not be exactly the same as others, and may vary either way by approximately a year. On the average though, for the 40 men that he and his colleagues studied, the ages quoted seem to apply.

Each of the stages (either stable or transitional) have specific functions that the man experiencing the particular stage must confront and deal with before going on to the next stage of adult development. For the stable periods in a man's adult life the primary task, according to Levinson: "....is to build a life structure: a man must make certain choices, form a structure around them, and pursue his goals and values within this structure," (p.49). Levinson cautions that even in these so-called "stable" periods, stress and anxiety can be present during the experiences of facing choices and making decisions. Transitional periods represent a much less stable period and are significant in that they mark the end of one life stage and the beginning of the next. According to Levinson:

> The primary tasks of every transitional period are to question and reappraise the existing structure, to explore various possibilities for change in self and world, and to move toward commitment to

crucial choices that form the basis for a new life structure in the ensuing stable period. (p.49)

Early Adult Transition

The adolescent male approaches adulthood through the Early Adulthood Transition which begins about age 17 and ends at age 25. The principal tasks of this transition stage are "....to terminate pre-adulthood and begin early adulthood," (p.56). Bridging the two stages of adulthood and pre-adulthood: "The transition ends when he gets beyond the boundary and begins to create a life structure within the adult world"(p.57).

Early Adulthood

Upon leaving the Early Adulthood Transition man enters his first adult stage which lasts for approximately the next 18 years. Within this first adult stage Levinson identifies three distinct periods: Entering the Adult World (age 22 to 28), the Age Thirty Transition (age 28 to 33), and the Settling Down Period (age 33 to 40). Each of these periods present to the young man who is entering and becoming part of the adult world, specific tasks that he must deal with before moving on to the next stage. How he deals with these tasks will have impact on each successive adult stage and will influence the level of satisfaction he will derive from his life in the adult world.

Entering the Adult World

In the Entering the Adult World period Levinson found that the young man deals with two contrasting tasks: "He needs to explore the possibilities for adult living: to keep his options open, avoid strong commitments and maximize the alternatives.", while at the same time he must try "....to create a stable life structure: become more responsible and....make something of himself." (p.58)

The Age Thirty Transition

The next stage, the Age Thirty Transition, will be a period in which a man examines and assesses the choices he has made for his first life structure. At this time he begins to realize that if there are any flaws in his original choices, he should try to correct them now if he is to make anything of himself. Levinson describes it this way:

> A voice within the self says: "If I am to change my life - if there are things in it I want to modify or exclude, or things missing I want to add - I must now make a start, for soon it will be too late." (p. 58)

Settling Down

During the Settling Down period of the Early Adulthood stage, the young man, having examined his first life structure and made what he considers the appropriate adjustments, embarks on a course in which he undertakes two principal tasks:

(a) He tries to establish a niche in society: to anchor his life more firmly, develop competence in a chosen craft, become a valued member of a valued world.

(b) He works at making it: striving to advance, to progress on a timetable. (p. 59).

During this period the young man's striving for achievement is driven by the goals he has formulated in his earlier stages. Talk of climbing the "ladder of success" or "realizing one's dreams" are characteristic of this stage and culminate in what Levinson identifies as a sub-stage of the period, "Becoming One's Own Man." By this Levinson means that the young man has "...to become a senior member in one's world, to speak more strongly with one's own voice, and to have a greater measure of authority," (p. 60) This marks the end of the Early Adulthood period and the approach of the Mid-Life Transition.

Early Adulthood is characterized by experimentation and exploration. Minor adjustments to a man's initial life structure may occur during the Age Thirty Transition. This is followed by his dedication to the tasks of making his mark in the adult world and, hopefully, achieving success at "Becoming One's Own Man". Throughout this period little thought is given to the importance of time as a factor. After all, he is still a young man who is yet to reach his halfway point chronologically. Mistakes in the choices he makes for his first life structure can always be modified or changed. There is always enough time to do this, and what's more, there are so many other endeavors he would like to explore. As he comes to the end of his Early Adulthood stage all this will change and the importance of reaching the mid-point in his life will soon become very significant.

Mid-Life Transition

Arriving at the mid-point of his life, man again enters a transitional period. Like the Early Adult Transition, the Mid-Life Transition (age 40 to 45) provides a bridge between the two adult periods - Early Adulthood and Middle Adulthood. As with his earlier transitional period, a man again begins a period of assessment, reflection and analysis. What he has done with his life to this point is examined and questioned. The successes and failures of his first 40 years are tallied and the results reflected upon. Levinson's research showed that the reactions by men in this transition will vary.

For some men, the results of their reflections leave them quite happy with themselves at this point in their lives. These men experience very little stress and move on to Middle Adulthood with little difficulty. For some of the men observed by Levinson, this period has little impact as they do very little reflection or questioning. They also move into their Middle Adulthood with little difficulty. For most men in the study, however, Levinson concluded that this transitional stage represented "....a period of great struggle within the self and with the external world," (p.60). For them the Mid-Life Transition:

> ...brings a new set of developmental tasks. The life structure again comes into question. It becomes important to ask "What have I done with my life? What do I really get from and give to my wife, children, friends, work, community - and self? What is it I truly want for myself and others?" A man yearns for a life in which his

actual desires, values, talents and aspirations can be expressed. (p.60)

During this transitional period considerable time is spent reflecting on the choices that a man made in his first life structure. In choosing a particular life structure there is a corresponding reflection of other possibilities. However, during the first life structure in Early Adulthood there is a sense that there will always be time in which to make changes to his structure. As a young adult time is still on his side.

At Mid-Life many men suddenly realize that time is no longer the ally that they once had and that making certain choices now will have more serious ramifications. Therefore it is crucial during this stage that the analysis of a person's life to the present be accurate, so that he may make correct choices for the future. It is also important that those possibilities he rejected earlier, yet were important to him, be carefully re-examined before he enters his Middle Adult stage. A man who has spent years in business may have done so for what he now feels were the wrong reasons. In his earlier years the thought of being a novelist may have been very important but was put aside while he pursued his career in commerce. A marriage that began under dubious conditions (family, peer, or social pressure) may come under closer scrutiny at this transitional stage. Whether it was career, relationships, goals or dreams that were important to him in his earlier adulthood, he has, in the Mid-Life Transition, time in which he may make careful considerations and determine what changes, if any, he should make to his life structure. Levinson found that by age 45, a man must leave the Mid-Life Transition stage and create a life structure that will carry him through his

Middle Adulthood stage. How well he uses his Mid-Life Transition will determine the level of his satisfaction in his next adult stage.

Middle Adulthood

Levinson's (1978) research revealed that the men in his study varied in the level of success with which they dealt with the Mid-Life Transition and their choices of a life structure for their Middle Adulthood. For example, he found that:

> Some men have suffered such irreparable defeats in childhood or early adulthood and have been so little able to work on the tasks of their Mid-Life transition that they lack the inner and outer resources for creating a minimally adequate structure. (p. 61)

Others were able to select a structure that was reasonable for them and allowed a fair level of satisfaction. There were others who entered their middle years with a life structure that offered both promise and excitement:

> For these men, middle adulthood is often the fullest and most creative season in the life cycle. They are less tyrannized by the ambitions, passions and illusions of youth. They can be more deeply attached to others and yet more separate, more centered in the self. For them the season passes in its best and most satisfying rhythms. (p.62)

The work of Levinson and his colleagues described the experiences of men from four occupational groups: executives, novelists, biologists and workers. One may ask the question: Would the descriptions and findings also

apply to men at a similar stage in their lives who are drawn from another occupational group?

This work is a study of mid-career male educational administrators. In undertaking this study I hoped to discover to what extent these administrators recognized that they were experiencing or had experienced transitional periods, and if so, how they dealt with them. Had there been major adjustments in their perceptions of themselves and their careers? Were the dreams of their youth still significant? Had changes in society's values and attitudes affected them significantly in a personal way as well as in the way they administer the schools under their jurisdiction? Answers to these questions may help us to understand the career aspirations of our present administrators and help them prepare for a future that is satisfying and productive. We may be able to decide if the concepts of Levinson on adult development are useful in classifying the administrators' experiences, with possible significance for future research.

Research Question

What are the perceptions which mid-career male educational administrators hold of themselves and of their careers?

Specific Questions

a) How do mid-career educational administrators perceive their present positions?

b) How have mid-career educational administrators changed their perceptions of their careers since first entering their profession?

c) Does the school system in which they work offer any special support to administrators during their mid-career transition?

d) What perceptions do mid-career administrators have of themselves at this stage of their lives?

e) What aspect of their present adult stage causes them the most satisfaction and, conversely, what causes the greatest frustration, both in their professional and personal lives?

Definition of Terms

Mid-career educational administrator: A male educator between the ages of 35 and 50 years, presently an active administrator, and one who has held an administrative position for at least five years.

I have restricted the study to male administrators for the following reasons. As it is the intent of the study to make a comparison to the concepts and theories developed by Levinson, and as Levinson's work in 1978 was restricted to males, there was a desire to maintain a similar approach. Further, I believed that my skills as a researcher and my own knowledge of career might not be sufficient to converse with female respondents as appropriately as I would with male respondents. Finally, as I am presently a male administrator in mid-career, there was a desire to undertake this study for personal as well as professional reasons.

Significance

Our present educational work force is aging, and this has resulted in a declining number of career options. It is hoped that a study of mid-life male administrators and their perceptions of themselves and their careers may provide useful insights of the educational system. Such insights could result in suggestions for change to our administrative approach, based on greater sensitivity to the needs of mid-career administrators as they go through transition.

Assumptions

It was assumed that administrators in the study would:

a) be able to reflect on their perceptions of themselves and their careers and be willing to share these perceptions candidly with the researcher,

b) recognize that they are passing through a transition in their adult development,

c) have some recognition of support mechanisms used during their transitions,

d) have made some plans for their future careers, and

e) recognize the benefit of understanding transitions in making personal and career decisions.

Limitations

1) By delimiting the study to male administrators, the findings may not apply to female administrators.

2) The skill of the interviewer and time constraints may limit the credibility of the findings.

3) By limiting the study to administrators willing to participate, the findings may not be reflective of the views of other male mid-career administrators.

Delimitation

Only six respondents were chosen from two school systems in Alberta, and therefore data collected are not intended to be representative of administrators in general.

Ethical Considerations

Through personal contact and in writing I assured confidentiality and anonymity to respondents. Confirmation was given that the final text would make no reference to the individual, school or school jurisdiction Each respondent was given a transcript of his interview for verification and correction. At each session, and after the transcripts had been reviewed by the respondents, permission was sought to use the material in the study. Respondents were reminded that they would have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Outline of Study

Chapter 1 contained an overview of the study and an identification of the problem to be researched. In Chapter 2 the design of the study and methodology are outlined. Chapter 3 presents an analysis of the data as they relate to the specific questions that arose from the Problem Statement. Also in Chapter 3, themes that arose from the data are described. Chapter 4 contains three sections: an overview of the research, a discussion of the findings as they relate to literature, and a description of my personal thoughts on the work undertaken.

Chapter 2

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter includes the conceptual framework from which the study was conceived, the criteria used to determine the way in which the study was conducted, an account of the process by which the research was done and the manner in which the data were analyzed.

Research Design

This is an interpretive study designed to examine data retrieved through taped conversations with people who were active mid-career educational administrators. It was my desire to investigate the lived experiences of these mid-career administrators and in so doing, come to know them better. This work attempted to discover the essence of what it means for male educational administrators to be in mid-career.

Turner (1981), Lincoln & Guba (1985), Van Manen (1984) and Weber (1985) offer valuable insights into the conduct of such a study. For Turner, the interpretive approach using grounded theory has many advantages:

> It promotes the development of theoretical accounts and explanations which conform closely to the situation being observed

> so that the theory is likely to be intelligible to and usable by, those in the situations studied, and is open to comment and correction by them. The theories developed are likely to be complex rather than oversimplified ways of accounting for a complex world, and this quality is likely to enhance their appeal and utility. (pp. 226-227).

Given the question under study, "What are the perceptions which mid-career educational administrators hold of themselves and of their careers?", the interpretive method of research offered the most appealing approach. People are complex beings living in a complex world and to try and reduce their lived experiences to statistical tables on this or that aspect of their lives did not seem appropriate. I also believed that Van Manen's (1985) comments on phenomenological research and writing offered a methodological structure that best suited the situation at hand. For Van Manen:

> ...phenomenological research may be seen as a dynamic interplay among four procedural activities:
>
> a) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
>
> b) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
>
> c) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
>
> d) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting. (p. 39).

As a former administrator I was interested in learning from others who may have had similar experiences. It was also hoped that the research would be conducted in a manner that would reveal what it was like to be an administrator who was presently active in the field and avoid any perceptions that I may have formulated when I was actively engaged in that career. As the researcher, I also hoped that by extracting themes and describing the phenomenon, I would produce something of value for all parties, myself, the administrators, and other mid-career teachers who wished to know themselves better.

Methodology

The primary method for gathering research data was the interview. Considering the personal nature of the research, attempts were made to conduct each interview in a manner and location that generated trust in order to avoid what Weber (1985) described as the risks and potential for betrayal that poorly conceived interviewing can create. For Weber, risk-taking in the interview can work in two ways: "....we run the risk of revealing that which we do not want to reveal. On the other hand, we also run the risk of gaining valuable insight into whatever it is that we discuss" (p. 66). The potential for betrayal, however, is much more complex and requires special consideration by the interviewer. Foremost among the concerns of the interviewee is that his contribution is accurately reflected in the written word. In the case of taped interviews (which were used) and official transcripts that can be verified, the accuracy of quotations can normally be assured. The greatest potential for misrepresentation and inaccuracy, though, is in the

interpretation of the words and the context in which they are used. The interviewee cannot deny the transcript as recorded, but does not have the luxury of reflection that is accorded to the interviewer as he begins to describe in writing what has been learned. As Weber (1985) notes:

> Writing down verbatim someone's oral language transforms that language, robbing it at times of its power, clarity, and depth, even its meaning. Verbatim transcriptions make little accommodation for tone of voice and emphasis, and little accommodation for the differences in style, words and form that exist between oral and written modes of communication. (p. 71)

Yet the request to interview and the acceptance to be interviewed does present a most powerful tool in the study of a particular phenomenon. Providing that the pitfalls are noted and sensitivity is exercised, the interview should produce accurate data. Weber (1985) states: "The Interview experience holds a potential for the development of trust and commitment, and for the growth of a new human relationship, and a new or deepened understanding" (p. 66).

Data Collection

Pilot Studies

The collection of data included a pilot study involving a single mid-career administrator, as well as a second pilot study involving five post-

graduate students at the University of Alberta. From these exercises, I gained experience in the techniques of interviewing, in conducting taped interviews, transcribing tapes for verification, and in analysis of data collected. I also collected feedback on the types of questions being asked, and was able to narrow the focus of the study being proposed.

Selection of Respondents

Through personal contacts with two separate school boards in Alberta, permission was granted to approach administrators and seek their participation in the research. Both school boards provided the names of approximately 20 principals and vice-principals who met the definition used in the research of a mid-career administrator. After contact was made with 15 of the proposed candidates, it was evident that I would have little difficulty in obtaining willing participants. Fourteen of the fifteen administrators contacted answered in the affirmative, and the person who declined stated that he did so purely because of job-related matters; otherwise he would have gladly participated.

The original proposal called for five administrators to be interviewed, but I decided to expand this number to six, to provide a back-up in the event that one of the original five would have to withdraw for some reason after the first round of interviews. I placed all fourteen names in a box and withdrew six, the last being the back-up respondent. Four of the names drawn were from one board, and two came from the other board. Because all of the first five administrators were able to continue after the initial

interview, the sixth person, identified as "Frank", was interviewed only once. Where appropriate I have included his material in the body of the work.

Throughout the research, beginning with the initial contacts with the school boards, I kept a daily log. A sample entry is included in the appendix.

None of the administrators were previously known to the researcher. All were extremely co-operative and quite enthusiastic about taking part in the research.

The Interviews

The interviews were semi-structured. There were some standard questions that the researcher relied on to begin the interview, but for the most part the administrators were free to pursue areas that concerned them and thus add to their perceptions as mid-career administrators. For readability and confidentiality the respondents were assigned ficticious names using the first six letters of the alphabet, i.e., Allan, Bob, Charles, David, Eric and Frank. The verification and clarification of the first set of transcripts often provided areas of further examination. All administrators remarked that after the first interview they spent time considering their perceptions of themselves and their careers more often than they had in recent memory. This reflection by the administrators was expressed in the following comments:

> You know, I've never thought about that, but I guess you're right, that is something I should have done before. (Eric)

> You have asked me questions that no one else has asked and it has caused me a great deal of thought. (Bob)

> Since our first interview session I've given a lot of thought to what we talked about. Well, it has just made me realize a little more about myself. (Eric)

> What you are doing should have been done a long time ago and should be done more often. We just don't take the time to think about ourselves, about the things you have raised. (David)

The interview was conducted in a manner that allowed the administrator to share his experiences and, where appropriate, for me to offer my thoughts. This was done in a relaxed unstructured manner. At each stage confidentiality was assured.

Data Credibility

Each administrator was interviewed twice. On both occasions the administrators were asked to allow for a minimum of an hour, but no longer than an hour and a half per taped session. After each administrator was interviewed for the first time, the tapes were transcribed and the typed transcripts returned to him for verification and clarification, where necessary. When this was completed a second interview was scheduled and a similar process of transcription, verification and clarification was conducted. This provided a further check of the data. After each transcript was approved

by the administrator, permission was requested and granted to use the material for the thesis work. In total, there were 10 hours of taped interviews.

As the study progressed, I followed up with individual respondents to ensure that the themes emerging from the study were credible to them. Further, I discussed these with two other educators who provided a peer review of the themes for transferability. Finally, my advisor read the original transcripts and examined the subsequent data categories to verify their support in the original transcripts.

Data Analysis

The basis on which the collected data were analyzed reflected the thoughts of Lincoln & Guba (1985): "Within the Naturalistic Paradigm (and in updated versions of the conventional paradigm as well) data are not viewed as given by nature but as stemming from an interaction between the enquirer and the data sources (human or non-human)" (p.332). The significance here is on the word interaction, where the researcher is not just a passive bystander in the research but one who actively takes part. Further, Lincoln & Guba(1985) also state:

> The process of data analysis then, is essentially a synthetic one in which the constructions that have emerged (been shaped by) enquirer-source inter-actions are reconstructed to meaningful wholes. Data analysis is thus not a matter of data reduction, as is frequently claimed, but of induction. (p.333)

Attempts were made to reflect intently on the responses of the administrators to find themes common to all the respondents and also to compare their responses to the theories of Levinson on adult development, with particular focus on the mid-life transition.

The transcripts were analyzed using a computer word-processing program to isolate responses or statements that related to the five specific questions around which this thesis was conducted:

a) How do mid-career educational administrators perceive their present position?

b) How have mid-career educational administrators changed their perceptions of their careers since first entering their profession?

c) Does the school system in which they work offer any special support to administrators during their mid-career transitions?

d) What perceptions do mid-career administrators have of themselves at this stage of their lives?

e) What aspect of their present adult stage causes them the most satisfaction and, conversely, the greatest frustration both in their professional and personal lives?

Using content analysis, the transcripts were reviewed for meanings related to the research questions. These sections were named and sorted into similar categories. The categories were then reviewed to ensure consistency within, to avoid overlapping data units and to make certain that they related to the appropriate research question. The transcripts were returned to and re-read again to allow for identification of themes.

In Chapter 3 the data are analyzed and references made to the transcripts using a number system. The first number of the reference identifies the administrator, e.g., 1 is Allan, 2 is Bob, etc. The second number refers to the interview, whether 1 or 2. These numbers are followed by the page number of the transcript from which the quote is taken. Therefore 4-1, p. 9, in brackets, indicates a quote from David's first interview, located on page 9 of his transcript.

Chapter 3

DESCRIPTION OF THE FINDINGS

This chapter is composed of two parts. In the first, the collected data are organized to reflect the administrators' responses as they relate to the research questions. Secondly, there is an identification and discussion of themes which emerged from the conversations.

Research Questions

Question 1: How do mid-career educational administrators perceive their present positions?

The respondents in this research varied in age and career stage, therefore their responses and perceptions appeared to reflect their individual differences. The data indicated however that certain similarities regarding work and personal life were evident regardless of age or stage of career. Two perceptions that these respondents held in common were:

(a) that they had reached a point in their lives and their careers where thoughts of their future were more important now than at an earlier age, and

(b) being involved in administration was seen as a way of "doing things for their students."

Administrators in Transition

Bob, who was the youngest of the group at age 39, was still looking forward to achieving his goal of becoming a principal but had to accept that his previously set goal would not be achieved by the age of 40. He held positive impressions of himself and of his value to the system: "I really believe that what I have done here with the staff has made a difference for the kids, for the parents and for the community. I really believe that" (2-1, p. 13).

Eric, just turned 50, had been a principal for several years and saw his remaining years as an educator as an opportunity to consolidate and build on his achievements:

> I get a lot of satisfaction from a really well-run school, now what can I do next year? Maybe make it run better, get a little more satisfaction back into the staff room...making your kids a bit happier with their lot in life of being educated. I mean, education ought to be fun. (5-1, pp. 11,12)

Allan expressed as a priority the need for administrators and teachers to continue to improve their skills and expertise in their profession through summer courses or weekend classes: "I felt it would be unfair to my students if I never moved from the class[room] for 25 years and hadn't taken anything. That...[would be]...wrong for me" (1-1, p. 19). He was anticipating his retirement in seven or eight years "if my health spares me," and has continued his personal belief in academic achievement. He was looking forward to contributing to the betterment of the religious environment at the parish, school or post-secondary level. Allan had been principal of a school which was forced to close because of declining enrollment and would consider a principalship again, but did not consider himself "the upward mobile type of person as much as the younger administrators might be" (1-1, p. 21).

Charles had also given thought to changing his position and would eventually like to be considered for an administrative post at the secondary level, or a position dealing with personnel at the central office. He recognized that he was passing through mid-life and believed he had assessed his prospects realistically. Acknowledging that he had "less time left than I've put in [teaching]," he had now begun to consider his future in terms of career goals and, ultimately, retirement. According to Charles an unfortunate reality of his profession was that retirement benefits are based on a person's best five years financially. This created a certain amount of immobility, as administrators are reluctant to give up larger schools which carry larger administrative allowances. With declining enrollments and an aging teaching force, most of the administrators who took part in this research, said the lack of mobility and opportunity at the administrative levels were major causes of

frustration among professionals, and particularly mid-career educators who aspired to administrative positions.

David had, at this stage of his career and life, given considerable thought to his future. At 41,he believed his previous experience in private enterprise had helped him tremendously in his educational career, and he perceived a number of alternatives to consider. Although recognizing that retirement was more often in his thoughts now than it had been five or ten years previously, he was not yet ready to retire: "I'm looking to new challenges. I've been in this particular school now five years and I would like, probably if not this year, next year, to move to a new challenge" (4-2, p.9).

David had also reconsidered that an earlier career goal of advancing to a superintendent's position no longer had any appeal for him, and was giving serious thought to returning to the classroom.

All of the administrators expressed high levels of satisfaction in their present positions, notwithstanding the frustrations they readily identified yet accepted as "coming with the territory." They expressed few regrets about having chosen administration and felt that if they had the opportunity to go back and choose again, they would opt for administration. In fact, Charles believed that the fact that he was in administration might be the only reason he was still an educator.

Doing Things for Children and Teachers

Each of the administrators saw his position as an instrument for achieving results, either on behalf of students or teachers. An important part of this perception was the personal contact with both groups.

Allan considered contact with students the most important part of his work. He believed that as administrators remove themselves further from classroom (meaning student) contact, the less effective they were likely to be as educators:

> "I want that contact with the students. I have some qualities that I'd like to share with them and I think I have something to give to help them, not just in the subject matter that they're learning, but with their total lives" (1-1, p.12).

Bob, who believed he had made a difference, saw himself as a facilitator, a catalyst in bringing issues and people together for resolution of joint concerns. Improving working conditions and bringing students, teachers and parents together so that they could resolve problems that arise, were a high priority in his mind.

Care and respect for the children under his jurisdiction were the most important aspects of his role as an educator, according to Charles. To emphasize how strongly he felt on this point he said:

> If there is a person in an educational position that is not satisfied, that is finding it difficult to wake up in the morning and come to

> work, and treat these little people that we have in our care with due respect, and hoping they do grow and learn that day, then they had better get out. (3-1, p. 16)

David also emphasizes the relationship with children as being the most important aspect of his position: "You've got to like kids. You've got to be willing to go above and beyond the call of duty, so to speak, and this whole idea of care giving, I think is critical" (4-2, p.1). David's conviction regarding the importance of contact with students was so strong that he was contemplating giving up administration and returning to the classroom.

Bringing meaning and direction to students' lives was most important to Eric, "so they don't get side-tracked by alcohol, by drugs, by promiscuous sex, and then of course experience all the unhappiness that comes with it" (5-1, p. 17). He believed that these were the realities of life, but being aware of the pitfalls and pointing out that people can avoid them in their lives, might help the students have more productive and happier lives.

The perceptions of these mid-career educational administrators varied in particular detail as a result of their particular age and career stage however all administrators were in agreement in what they considered to be the primary purpose of their work, i.e., doing things for others. Their thoughts on the future, while different in specifics, indicated that each was in a period of reflection and planning as they contemplated the remaining years as educators.

Question 2: How have mid-career educational administrators changed their perceptions of their careers since first entering their profession?

All respondents recognized that their profession had undergone significant changes since they first became teachers. As in Question 1, responses varied as to specifics, but certain similarities did emerge upon close examination of the data.

The major areas of change as identified by the respondents fell into the following categories:

1) There was significantly more pressure on teachers to address issues that they, as administrators, did not believe were specifically educational.

2) The changing demographics of their school population has had an effect on how they approach the administration of their schools.

3) New teachers were generally better trained and were more skillful than they (the administrators) had been when they had entered the profession.

4) Most of the administrators interviewed commented on the difficulty that their teacher-colleagues had in obtaining administrative positions under the present situation of declining enrollments and funding reductions.

5) The greatest change in the profession, for the administrators, appeared to be in the changed status of the teacher as an authority figure.

Expansion and Change of School Mandate

Allan perceived that the number of students who come from broken homes, "...and.are coming to school here who are saying they're solely on their own" (1-1, p. 9), has influenced the manner in which he related to many of his students.

Charles expressed the belief that "the demands on us as professional educators, myself included, have changed. I've noticed a definite increase in having to deal with the problems and concerns that I personally don't think are educational" (3-1, p. 6). Charles saw this as an ongoing concern, as funding for social programs continued to be reduced: " The school is expected in a way to sort of pick that up and carry the ball" (3-2, p. 8).

David perceived a similar increase in demands on the school to address social problems, but looked upon the added resources that he had received in a positive manner: "I think it enhances the whole idea of care-giving, of co-operation with the community" (4-1, p. 12).

Because parents are raising smaller families and are better educated, Eric saw an increase of pressure on teachers to be more accountable. In his early years as a teacher he believed it was more likely that a parent would support the teacher in most situations, but maintained that this was no longer

the case. Eric also saw the tendency of parents "to dote over these one or two children" (5-1, p.5), as a source of erosion of the teacher's authority.

Professional Standards

For most of the administrators there was agreement that the teachers entering the profession were better trained and more skilled than ever before. Credit for this was given to the training programs in the universities, the selection process, and the competitive situation in the job market. Charles thought that "the practicum is much improved and it's really attempting to do a much greater job of getting these people into the classrooms and giving them the practical experience" (3-2, p. 7).

David believed that the major change in the profession was that educators are now dealing more with the whole child than formerly, and to do that he recognized that the teachers today "are better trained. We are better judges of society and what society wants" (4-2, p. 8).

Eric also saw a positive improvement in the quality of teachers: "I'd have a hard time matching the skills that some of the teachers have that are coming out of university now" (5-1, p. 6). He gave credit for this improvement to the research that has taken place and the role that the universities have played in the selection and training of teachers.

The administrators also raised concerns that they believed must be addressed if the profession is to meet the challenges ahead. One of these major concerns was the lack of mobility for teachers aspiring to

administrative positions. For two respondents, Allan and Bob, mobility and advancement opportunities would be enhanced if the policies governing promotion and teacher transfer were better articulated and consistently followed. They both believed that they had been treated fairly by their boards, but had concerns for some of their colleagues who had unsuccessfully sought administrative positions on several occasions.

Charles believed that he has been fortunate to achieve an administrative position early in his career but saw the lack of mobility both within the present administrative ranks and for potential administrators as an issue that the boards must deal with.

Frank expressed the opinion that those responsible for educational decisions must endeavor to make the profession more attractive if it is to retain the highly qualified and capable individuals who are entering it. Frank's view was that teachers entering the profession now are more perceptive than when he began, and if they see other opportunities outside education where they can achieve their personal goals more quickly, they are likely to leave after a few years.

The perceptions of the administrators demonstrated that they recognized that significant changes had taken place and that they had a number of concerns. All respondents believed that there were areas which could be improved in the delivery of educational services if their superiors would address the concerns raised. For the most part, the respondents believed that, while some changes caused them concern, they were generally

optimistic. The quality of teaching, and teachers, has improved and they believed the improvement will continue.

Question 3: Does the school system in which they work offer any special support to administrators during their mid-career transitions?

For those administrators who specifically identified that they had gone through or were going through a mid-career transition, there appeared to be evidence that the system in which they worked offered support. For all administrators the system created an environment which they believed was supportive as they evaluated their present positions. All respondents believed that their system (separate board) was different from the public system, that the difference was positive in nature, and was worthy of retention as a separate entity.

The respondents perceived that dealing with contentious issues was simplified as a result of the philosophical basis of their system. Those administrators who had experience in both the public and separate systems expressed empathy for their colleagues in the public system who, they felt, had no such common philosophy with which to work. They were also complimentary of their counterparts in the public system because they believed they were doing a very good job under difficult circumstances.

The basis for the respondents' perceptions of differences between the two systems and their perceived source of support in their lives and careers appeared to be centered on concepts of size, common philosophy, special in-

service training, and an indefinable belief which, for Bob, was "hard to put words to it but there is an atmosphere. It's an environment, where maybe in the public school is not quite as much" (2-2, p.7).

Common Philosophy

The ability to rely on a basic philosophy founded on specific religious values gave the respondents a feeling of support and comfort. This perception was expressed by Frank:

> I do like the idea that we are overall of a general moral status, and I don't know how to say it any other way...or value status, I guess, rather than moral....If I thought there was a tangle among staff about abortion, it would have an uncomfortable feeling to me. But it's the things like that, I think, that the value system overall helps us to support each other. (6-1, p. 12).

The ability to approach any subject from a specific set of values helped to unify and simplify their roles as educators and in decision-making as administrators. Their commitment to the values of the system and their desire to educate the whole child was perceived to be easier as a result of having this common set of values. Their common philosophy, as well, was a source of support and satisfaction as they reflected on their careers and their future. Allan offered the following comment in support of this observation: "I am satisfied with what I'm doing, I don't even question my life. I don't think there is anything in it that I'm unhappy about" (1-1, p. 13).

David was more specific in his analysis of the value of the common philosophy. He believed that the example of Jesus Christ as the "Master Teacher", was a source of inspiration to motivate both himself and his staff in their pedagogical endeavors:

> I think we have that little bit of leg up, and I'm not being facetious when I say that I feel fortunate that I have a model that I can follow in science, in social studies. I think it gives me a slight advantage [over] my peers [in the other system] (4-1, p. 9).

Charles held similar views:

> I think because of the unique vision, and unique mission that it has...that's been of benefit, certainly to me, and I'd like to think to everybody that is employed, and the students that attend it, and the parents that are associated with it...I guess that gets to the root of the whole philosophy of the Catholic school system. And I'm not a Bible pusher, or whatever, but I really think that's something that's been my strength and I think the strength of the system (3-1, p. 11).

Size of the System

The size of the system was also seen by the administrators as conducive to support for them in their day to day jobs. Access to superiors, collegial support, personal interaction with fellow administrators, and even a feeling of camaraderie were the most often mentioned benefits of their smaller

system. While there were expressions of concern about resources available in the larger public system which were not available to them, all administrators believed the more personal relationship was a very significant advantage.

Charles believed that the size of their system allowed for more understanding which often resulted in needed support at the school level. Because of their ability to know the senior administrators and support people on a personal level, their school concerns could be dealt with in a more efficient manner.

Goal setting by the senior officials was also seen as an exercise that fostered mutual respect and understanding due to the fact that everyone knew each other. Describing this exercise, Charles offered:

> The superintendent[s] of the board had decided that we should all have written goals, written objectives. And being wise men as they are, they were usually able to spot something that could be a little unreasonable. It's a really decent process now, [a] fairly well-defined process now, and I think that helps a lot. (3-1, p.8-9)

Charles believed that such an approach would be less successful if they were operating in a larger system: "Like I said, I think we all know each other better simply because of the size" (3-2, p.10).

Allan also found that the size of the system in which he worked offered professional support that may not exist in the public system:

> That support system is there, and from colleagues in the system as well. When you're kind of feeling down with what you're doing, whether it's in administration or teaching or what have you, I think it's the colleagues in the profession, definitely, that nurture that. (1-1, p. 23).

Because of their size the ability to communicate with superiors on a personal or first-name basis was a source of support and satisfaction to the administrators. If Frank had a problem he didn't:

> feel uncomfortable...picking up [the telephone] and talking to the superintendent. I don't feel [that] he feels...I should have handled it myself. So, from that point of view I think there's a nice support system among the parties in our school system. (6-1, p. 12)

Special In-Service Training

The administrators also identified in their system special efforts made by the central administration to offer additional in-service sessions which went beyond what was commonly expected. In addition to regular in-service sessions on curriculum and policy matters there were other sessions offered which were designed to keep administrators and staff abreast of any changes in Church policy regarding education. As well, administrators were encouraged to take other courses which were more reflective in nature and

help to make them think more about themselves and their careers. Eric has attended many of these sessions and offered the following:

> We [administrators] get together as a system, say, the first [or] second day of school. We'll have some kind of an inspirational speaker and the superintendent pumps us up, and buys us lunch, and that kind of thing. And, darn it, that goes a long way (5-1, p.9).
>
> It is called a reflection day....They started by being very religious-type topics. We sort of wanted to get in touch with what the Church teaching was on this and that. (5-2, p.1)

These sessions were often seen by the administrators as necessary to combat what they saw as strong challenges to the very existence of their system. The issue of plurality within the Church was a major concern according to David, and he maintained that only through more of these sessions would the administrators be prepared to meet the challenges presented. The reflective nature of some of these sessions were often seen as more beneficial as they drew much personal support from what was offered. Eric had this to say about these sessions:

> It made a lot of people really think about themselves on various issues, on what they thought of the liberalization of the Church, and Vatican II, and what they thought of social justice (5-2, p. 1). The staff came out of that feeling very good about themselves. It makes them reflect inwardly to determine where they stand with respect to their lives, their work, their social life, and so forth (5-1, p. 1).

Special Reflective In-Services and Future Plans

The special in-service sessions or religious courses were also seen as investments that would prove useful in the future, as well as providing comfort during their present mid-career transitions. Looking towards retirement, some of the administrators saw value in the in-services and religious courses as a way of contributing to their communities after they had left the teaching field. A sense of giving of themselves, or paying back to society was evident in some of their comments as they contemplated their post-education years. For Allan, being able to take these courses meant more than just adding to his own resume. It would allow him to offer something of himself in return: "When I [finish] in the classroom...I can do work, good work, in a parish, and have that knowledge to use for whatever group I'm involved in. Whether it's adults, or children, or what have you" (1-1, p. 16). Eric, who had recently become more involved in his church, looked forward to using his special skills and knowledge acquired while an administrator. Retirement for him meant he will "have a great deal more time to devote to this kind of activity [church work]" (5-2, p. 8).

Mid-Life Transition

For those administrators who had specifically identified a mid-life transition, the availability of reflective sessions was seen as supportive during what they saw as a confusing and unstable time in their lives. Eric, who clearly recognized that he had gone through a mid-life transition (although not at the time it took place), describes his feelings this way:

> I did recognize that I was doing a lot of reflection, a lot of discussion with my wife. We would discuss a number of things, especially feelings about certain things, about my career, about my family, about her. You spend a lot of time reflecting. (5-2, p. 6).

He recalled that taking the religious courses at that time certainly helped him through a rather difficult period. Remembering the courses, he acknowledged: "[They] aren't terribly academic in that sense, and therefore they [do] give you opportunity for a lot of reflection. So it was rather good that at that time I was taking [these] courses" (5-2, p. 7).

Summary

The data suggested that the system in which the administrators worked did offer something that they perceived as special for them. They could not identify that this support was designed specifically to deal with mid-career transitions, but they all believed that the environment created by their boards was conducive to supporting its staff at various stages of their lives and careers. Professional development courses of a reflective nature were seen as significant resources for educators as much as in-service sessions on new curriculum and policy. Becoming more aware of themselves as individuals and to be able to reflect on their lives, their dreams, their personal values, allowed the administrators to deal with their life-stages in a more positive and productive manner. Another by-product of professional in-servicing was that many of the administrators looked forward to contributing in a

meaningful way to their communities after their retirement from active employment in education.

Question 4: What perceptions do mid-career administrators have of themselves at this stage of their lives?

An investigation of the responses to this question revealed that the perceptions held by administrators of themselves at this stage of their lives varied and depended on where each of the administrators were in relation to their mid-life adult stage. Those just entering their mid-life transition were still less concerned with retirement, for example, than those administrators who had passed through this stage and were well into their mid-life period. All respondents, however, regardless of their particular age, admitted that they had thought about retirement, but for some the concept was more significant than for others. For all administrators, whether entering the mid-life transition or well into their mid-life adult stage there was evidence that they spent more time examining their lives to this point, and were tentatively making plans for their future. Reflection, examination and assessment seemed to occupy them more during this period. Areas of examination included family, career, health and the degree to which they had achieved the goals that they had set for themselves. All of these were expressed with respect to time, or time remaining. Do I have time to achieve my career goals? Do I have time to correct any errors in my earlier decisions? How can

I make my remaining years more productive and meaningful? Will there be time to make the contribution I know I wish to make? These seemed to be the questions that the administrators were asking themselves.

The administrators just entering their mid-life stage were more likely to believe that goals which were not achieved were still worth pursuing. Others who were satisfied with their accomplishments to date were looking for new challenges and goals. Those administrators who were further into their mid-life stage were less anxious about further achievements and were more likely to find comfort in their lives to the present, and more likely to be formulating plans for a productive life after leaving the educational field.

The Half-Way

For administrators just entering the mid-life stage, the acknowledgement that they may have fewer years remaining than they have already enjoyed, became significant. Bob expressed it this way:

> I see myself halfway in my teaching career, exactly halfway. And up to now I really didn't look at the end of my teaching career. But right now, since you're starting to go in the other direction, you're not going towards the middle anymore, you're going from the middle to the end. (2-1, p. 12).

Charles made a similar observation: "then I realized, by our point system, I have less time left than I have put in," (3-1, p. 11).

The arrival at the mid-point of their lives also meant that certain concepts that had previously been given little thought were now gaining importance. One such concept was retirement.

Retirement

Given the age range of the administrators, the degree of importance attached to reflecting on their future retirement differed. Those just experiencing the mid-life transition did not spend as much time thinking about retirement as those who had passed through and were well beyond the mid-life transition. Bob, who was just passing through his mid-life transition, admitted that he had thought of retirement: "If you had asked me that [thinking about retirement] three or four years ago, I would have said, 'That's a dumb question', but now I am [thinking about it]" (2-1, p. 11). At the same time, planning for retirement was still far less important than achieving goals that he had set for himself: "I'd like to become principal within the next few years." Another administrator, Charles, who was also just entering his mid-life stage, had given some thought to his retirement but still had important career goals to achieve. He hoped that he would still get the opportunity to become an administrator of a larger school or serve at the central office level: "I'd hate to think that I've been in education all my life, and didn't have that experience" (3-2, p. 10).

Those administrators closer to retirement no longer attached as much importance to promotions as they had in younger years. They were more content with what they had achieved in life, and while they were prepared to accept other challenges, or another administrative position, "upward mobility" as Allan described it, was not as important to them as it might be to the younger administrators.

Eric, the oldest of the group, no longer sought promotion, yet derived much satisfaction from what he had done with his life and what he was doing at the time of the interview. As he contemplated his future and possibly early retirement, he was determined to maximize his enjoyment in a career that had been very good to him. He offered the following assessment:

> You realize that it [education] is affording you a good living, a living with a lot of satisfaction, and you begin to look inward and say, "I am enjoying this, it's giving me a great deal of satisfaction, I enjoy the routine, and, damn it, I'm going to make the most of it. (5-2, p. 11).

New Challenges

Regardless of their stage of career all the administrators were contemplating new challenges. Whether they were just beginning to consider the second half of their lives or approaching retirement, all of them perceived new challenges as a means of continuing to lead productive and meaningful lives. David recognized that he was at a critical turning point and was exploring the possibility of returning to the classroom. This was, for

him, an extension of his personal philosophy of what education was all about. In his earlier years he had considered applying for more senior positions, but his recent observations of the constraints and pressures that came with such positions led him to believe that he would find little satisfaction in that area. He felt that the future of education was being greatly affected by technological change. As a consequence it was his view that the really exciting work was in the classroom, and he wanted to be part of it.

Other administrators were already making plans for productive lives after retiring from the education profession. Some of the possibilities were related to religious service or voluntary organizations. All administrators expressed a strong desire for ongoing activities that involved interaction with other people. The present need for contact with people through students and staff, and in post-education years was commented on by all administrators. The importance of student contact was very evident in Allan's comment: "I think that if I were taken away from that [involvement with students] I would just not be the same person. To be honest that's one of the things that keep me going in teaching" (1-1. p.12).

Charles also had strong feelings about the importance of contact with people: "I'd like to work out of the main office for a while, not for along time, [but] for a while. Because unless I change as I get older yet, I [would] miss the closeness of the staff and the students" (3-1, p. 11).

Administrators like Eric and Frank expressed similar opinions on people-oriented endeavors after they retired from their profession. They both believed that such work is needed and, in a sense, will be an extension of their life careers. There was also a belief that they have a duty to give back to

society something of themselves and to consider particularly the less fortunate. As Eric said of his plans to help others during retirement: "As long as I'm able to, I can minister to people [who are] less able" (5-2, p.8). Frank also considered some form of humanitarian service in his retirement years and contemplated work "in the service of something, like C.U.S.O" (6-1, p.12).

Assessment, Acceptance and Adjustment

For all the administrators this mid-life stage was an opportunity to conduct an indepth assessment of their accomplishments and shortcomings to this point in their lives. For some their assessment revealed disappointments over lost opportunities. In general however, when everything was taken into account all administrators displayed a high degree of satisfaction with what they had accomplished. There was some difference among the administrators when they considered the acceptance of their present stage. Those just entering their mid-life transition or entering their mid-life adult stage were less willing to accept their present positions, than those who were closer to retirement. The younger administrators were more confident that there may still be time to achieve the goals they had set for themselves in their young adulthood stage. Older administrators were more likely to accept that any goals they had not achieved were beyond them and tried to make the best of what time was left.

Bob had set a goal for himself to be a principal by age 40. He now realized and accepted that he was unlikely to achieve his objective. However he did not accept this as final, nor was he prepared to give up and had

adjusted his time frame to pursue his goal and become a principal in the next few years: "hopefully, if I'm fortunate" (2-1, p.12).

Frank, on the other hand, was farther along his mid-life stage and expressed some regret for not having "pushed himself" more in his earlier years. Had he done so, he believed he would have accomplished more. His regret gave way to acceptance, even satisfaction when he reflected on his whole career to this point and he believed that he had little to be "sorry about" (6-1, p.6).

David also felt positive about his accomplishments up to the present and contemplated a number of options, both within and outside of his profession. About retirement and his future he was quite firm: "Seriously think about retirement? No I'm not ready. I have other things that I feel I can accomplish in this life" (4-1, p.9).

Investment In Their Careers

The recognition that they had arrived at mid-life also meant that some administrators felt restricted by the choices they could make regarding their careers. Their investment of time in their careers made leaving the profession less attractive, because the idea of starting all over again caused them some concern. Attachment to pension plans and benefits that came with their positions were more important to them now than they had been in earlier years. Even a change to a different school was judged on the basis of what it might mean to their salaries. Most would consider larger schools or a central office position provided their level of benefits and pension

contributions would not suffer. Administrators who commented on this aspect did not like to think in these terms, but felt that the system penalized people if they considered smaller schools. All the administrators said they would consider careers outside education but only if such positions were extremely attractive. Two administrators, Bob and David, had experience in other occupations but were very happy that they had returned to education. Bob had tried a brief attempt in private enterprise which didn't work out and: "I ended up in the same school because something else came up and they got me back. I was really, really fortunate. And I never looked back, ever" (2-1, p.3).

David had a much more positive experience in the private sector but eventually decided that education was where he wanted to be:

> I have been out of the business [education]. I've come back to it. Why did I come back to it? I guess the answer to that is I like working with children. I enjoy them. I missed them. I wouldn't change that. (4-2. p.6).

All administrators perceived themselves as being happy with their career decisions. Although they recognized some limits in terms of career mobility they did derive satisfaction from what they were doing. Were they younger, the uncertainty or risks of a different career might be more attractive, but at this stage of their lives security was important. As Frank noted, he: "would rather be here, getting reasonably good money and doing something I like the majority of the time, than out there trying to start over" (6-1. p.7).

Summary

The perceptions that the administrators held of themselves at this stage of their lives varied.The differences depended on whether they were just entering their mid-life transition or adult stage or whether they were well into the mid-life stage and contemplating retirement. All of the administrators in this study used this stage of their lives to reflect on what they had accomplished, and to make plans for the second half of their lives. They placed a high value on the need for interaction with others (students, teachers, parents) as a source of personal and professional satisfaction. Whether they were planning changes in their present careers or contemplating their lives after they left education, all were firm that whatever the endeavor, there must be a focus on people.

Final acceptance of what they had achieved up to this point, was less likely among younger administrators than those who were well into their mid-life stage. Younger administrators who had not achieved the goals they had set for themselves were more likely to adjust the time frames and continue to pursue the goals that had not yet been reached. Older administrators were more likely to come to an acceptance of what they had achieved even if some original goals had not been fulfilled, and looked for ways to derive more satisfaction from their present positions. All of the administrators expressed a general satisfaction with their lives to the present and were optimistic about the future.

Younger administrators were more likely to consider career changes within and outside the education field, than the older administrators. However, all did recognize that the time they had invested in their present careers made alternate careers less attractive to them. There was an expression of concern by all that the lack of mobility within their profession was a cause for concern. They also believed that there is a relationship between the size of a school and an administrator's benefits, which impacts on the mobility of administrators. They also believed that the reluctance on the part of administrators to consider smaller schools, even if for valid reasons, may not be in the best interests of the system.

Question 5: What aspect of their present adult stage causes them the most satisfaction and, conversely, the greatest frustration, both in their professional and personal lives?

The administrators interviewed in this study consistently believed that at this stage of their lives they gained much more satisfaction than frustration from their careers. All were able to express areas that gave them frustration, but they were more likely to talk about the positive aspects of their jobs. When the data were examined for statements reflecting satisfactions and frustrations, the following list emerged:

Satisfactions:

1) working with students
2) working with staff
3) the ability to make a difference
4) watching students achieve
5) helping teachers do their jobs

6) recognition from colleagues whom they have helped

7) time for outside interests

8) receiving support and comfort from a common philosophy

9) running a good operation

10) stability of position

11) achieving reasonable goals

12) support from family

Frustrations:

1) changing attitudes of parents and students

2) lack of programs for students with special needs

3) dealing with perceived weaknesses in professional staff

4) exclusion from staffing decisions

5) expansion of the school mandate

6) inconsistency of policy implementation

7) lack of recognition

8) changing public perception of education

9) redirection of resources

10) political involvement in decision-making

11) lack of support for religious component of system.

These lists do not attempt to suggest that all the administrators expressed similar satisfactions or frustrations, nor is there any attempt to priorize them. They simply represent general impressions received through comments offered by different respondents at various points during the interviews. A closer examination of the lists suggests that the expressed thoughts on satisfaction and frustration could be realigned under more general headings:

Satisfactions:

A) interaction with people

B) doing a good job

C) value of extra-career interests.

Frustrations:

A) lack of involvement in decision-making

B) parental and public support

C) inconsistent policy implementation

Interaction With Other People

There seems to be evidence that the source of greatest satisfaction for the administrators interviewed was their contact with other people - students, colleagues and parents. Ironically this particular item also became an occasional source of frustration which will be discussed later.

Charles, who was enjoying his role as administrator, felt that while there was insufficient praise from superiors for the work of school administrators, this deficiency was more than made up for by the students with whom he worked. As Charles put it: "You get your strokes from the kids, the little ones, especially" (3-1, p. 8). Allan often worried about convincing his students of the value of an education. He would occasionally observe some of his students exhibiting a real spark of intellectual endeavor and this reassured him and made his efforts seem worthwhile. Allan suggested that he would rather forego an administrative position than give up

his daily contact with his students. For some of the administrators, such as Eric and Frank who were contemplating retirement, contact with people became a criteria for selecting work after they retired from the educational field. Frank was taking a Spanish course because he felt that his experience would be useful: "Maybe there's some group that I could work with somewhere, go...to help [after retirement]" (6-1, p. 7).

Doing A Good Job

Many of the administrators expressed thoughts that indicated they received a great deal of satisfaction from just doing a good job, which could take different forms. It might be helping a student succeed, advising a new teacher, or assisting another colleague through a difficult period in his career or personal life. Other job-related satisfactions came from improving the administrative approach which would help staff to achieve their goals.

Allan expressed this need to do well in this way:

> If I believe in something strongly enough, no matter what you're doing, that you do a good job of it, that you give it your best. And what I get personal satisfaction from is that I've done a good job. I think that's enough for me. (1-1, p. 20).

Similarly, Eric was getting "a lot of satisfaction from a really well-run school. Now what can I do? What can I do next year? Maybe make it run even better" (5-1, p. 11). Charles also supported this need for doing a good job: "I always have a standard goal, and that's to make sure that I'm doing whatever I can for the benefit of the people I'm with every day" (3-1, p. 9). Finally David offered:

> And I think that's part of my satisfaction, and it's part of my feeling of well-being that when it comes right down to it, it doesn't matter, as long as I'm happy, and as long as I feel that I'm doing the job right and I'm happy about it. (4-1, p. 13).

It would appear that for these administrators, the ability to do a good job gave them considerable satisfaction.

Interests Outside of Their Jobs

Some administrators admitted that they had interests that occupied their time away from the school. These interests could be either for financial gain (a business venture) or simply for pleasure (a hobby such as wood working). All administrators suggested that outside activities could be beneficial to them personally and could have side benefits that had a positive effect on their work as school administrators. All were firm, however, that any activity not directly related to their work should always be secondary to their primary roles. Charles admitted that when he first began his teaching

career he had to work during the summer because he needed the money. Even then, though, he believed that doing summer work did not affect his ability to be a good educator. At his present stage, he could not see how anyone could have more than one paying job without it having a negative impact on school performance. All administrators agreed that it was necessary to avoid such situations.

Those administrators who pursued outside interests stressed the positive effect such activities had on their lives and, indirectly, their performance in their educational jobs. The need to do something different and to relax doing it seemed for Eric, to be the primary reason for taking up his hobby: "It's being able to divert your attention to something that is quite different from your day-to-day work. And I find it very relaxing. It's relaxing to the soul." (5-2, p. 10). For David there was need to become more physically active: "I can go out during the summer or Christmas holidays, [or]...Easter, and get my hands dirty. And it's different. It's not that mental thing anymore" (4-2, p. 5).

The administrators expressed the view that involvement in outside activity for financial gain was wrong and unprofessional if it affected one's ability to perform his or her educational duties. While they all believed this, they also recognized that getting away from their day to day work and doing something different could have indirect benefits for themselves and their schools. Charles, however, expressed the view that with the present daily pressures of being a school principal, he would find it impossible to be engaged in a second job.

Other Factors Affecting Satisfaction

While all administrators expressed significant levels of satisfaction with their present positions, there seemed to be some diversity in the reasons why they were satisfied, between those who had recognized that they had had a mid-life transition, and those who were just entering this stage. For Eric and David, who both identified that they had gone through a transition, their perception of what they wanted now in life, differed from Bob and Charles who were just entering their mid-life stage. Eric described his transitional period which had occurred about two years prior as "a very unsettling time, it was a reckoning where I had done a lot of reflection" (5-1 p.12). When he came to the conclusion that he was never going to be a millionaire he decided that he would extract as much satisfaction as he could from what he was doing because his career had given him a decent life. Coming to terms with this allowed Eric to become more contented and satisfied with his life David also described his mid-life transition as a troubled stage in his life: "I think I was a little scared of what was going to happen in the future, in my future" (4-1, p. 3). Since that time, however, David had become: "more settled, more confident. Because my aspirations have changed, I'm secure within my knowledge of what I can give to children, to parents, to community. I think I'm satisfied" (4-1, p. 3). Neither Eric nor David aspired to senior positions and were less troubled by not having gone further in their careers. For them, satisfaction came from a sense of inner peace as opposed to what they could gain from external sources.

Bob and Charles, who were just entering the mid-life stage, still had aspirations of advancing their careers and were hoping that these more

responsible positions would enhance the satisfaction levels they now enjoyed. Both of these administrators were confident of their inter-personal skills and felt they had something to offer to the system. They enjoyed being involved in the resolution of problems that required their perceived skills and wanted higher levels of responsibility to more fully utilize their strengths. Bob, who was just entering his mid-career stage, expressed his perceptions at this stage by offering: "I'm perfectly happy with what I've done and where I'm at and where I'm going" (2-2, p. 11). However he was convinced that he had something to offer in more senior positions: "I'd like to become principal within the next few years, hopefully, if I'm fortunate enough" (2-1, p. 12).

Charles also considered that his personal skills qualified him for more senior posts. His perception of himself was not that he believed he was better than others but rather, that he felt he could make a positive contribution: "It is just that I feel that I have a strength working with people, and I would like to give that a shot" (3-2, p. 12).

For the administrators in this study their careers offered them a great deal of satisfaction. Those well into their mid-life stage appeared more content with what they had achieved and less concerned about advancement than those just beginning or going through their mid-life transition. While their careers did have areas that caused them frustration, it should be stressed that when asked to comment on whether they perceived themselves to be more satisfied with their careers than frustrated, they all responded that they were more satisfied.

Lack of Involvement in Decision Making

A major source of frustration for the administrators was their perception that they had little, if any, involvement in decision making in areas such as staffing, policies and programs. Some believed that the way in which staff were selected and assigned gave them little time to properly assess prospective teachers. Others believed that centrally-made decisions regarding school programs was increasing the demands on the school's time which, in some cases, resulted in programs that they believed were not of an educational nature. Administrators further believed that the absence of input from them often resulted in poor communication among staff, and poor morale.

In the area of promotions to principalships and assistant-principalships Allan expressed a deep concern:

> I see people applying for positions. I know these people. I know that they're qualified. I know they're honest people. I know that they are people who have a tremendous amount of good that they can share with people in the system. They have qualities that the system can gain from, and often, when the position is filled, it's not one of these people. (1-2, p.3-4).

Similarly, Bob believed that there was a need for a better system of making administrative appointments. Referring to inconsistencies with certain competitions, he noted: "There are some situations...where the system sometimes isn't fair. When some of the [hiring] policies are not followed, and

if the policies are not followed the way they're intended, then of course it does create frustrations" (2-1, p. 17). Frank believed that the method of selecting and assigning teachers was unsatisfactory: "We don't always get the opportunity to choose whom we work with. So I have found that a little frustrating" (6-1, p. 11). Bob was also concerned that he often had to rely on others for their opinion of a prospective teacher, and would have preferred to use his own judgment: "Any decision [on staffing] which is made by the system is based on what other people are saying" (2-2, p. 3).

Lack of Parental and Public Support

All administrators in the study recognized that the attitudes of parents and the public in general had changed dramatically over the years since they had first entered the profession. Much of this change was felt to be negative. The administrators believed that the increase in the number of single-parent families, the diminishing size of families and the concern by the public over the costs associated with education have all had an effect on their ability to do the job.

Eric observed that the tendency of families to have fewer children has resulted in some parents becoming more indulgent towards their children than in former years. Charles also worried about the growing number of taxpayers who do not have children in the school and who are challenging the legality of having to support an institution they do not use. Charles was also concerned about the increased number of parents who don't seem to have a

lot of time for their children: "I really get a little concerned I guess, to put it mildly, that we don't always get the added follow-up, the necessary reinforcement from the family" (3-2, p. 11).

Inconsistent Policy Implementation

The inconsistent implementation of board policies was seen by many of the administrators as a major cause of frustration that sometimes resulted in low morale. Among these administrators was a perception that, while policies existed regarding staffing, curriculum and administration, there were many observed instances where such policies were not followed. In the area of promotions, some administrators interviewed felt that a number of their colleagues had not received fair treatment. At the same time they all admitted that they believed that they, themselves, had been properly treated.

There were observations that some schools that did not implement central office policies were no worse off than those who had. In fact, some held the perception that those schools that failed in policy implementation often received a greater share of the resources than did their own schools.

Allan was concerned about the reluctance of the district office to more aggressively enforce the religious instruction requirement at the senior levels. In his mind, it was far too easy for students to opt out of religion courses because their academic program was already too heavy. For Allan the declining number of students taking religion represented a long range problem that was at the heart of the system's existence.

All these perceptions led the administrators to believe that there was a need for improved communication between the district office and the administrators. The administrators willingly admitted that their limited access to all the facts surrounding a particular decision could mean that their perceptions were incorrect. None the less, the perception did exist and they did have cause for concern. Their frustration over this inconsistency was best expressed by Bob: "I wish they would listen to individuals more and [that] they would follow the policies that they have set" (2-2, p.12).

The administrators in this study offered far more expressions of satisfaction with their present positions at this stage of their lives than they did frustration. Those just entering their mid-life transition or mid-life adult stage were still working to advance their careers. They believed their skills qualified them for more senior positions which would afford them more satisfaction. Administrators well into their mid-life adult stage were less concerned with promotion and appeared more content and secure within themselves. These administrators identified a difficult transitional period that they had experienced several years earlier. Now they sought satisfaction from what they had and not from what they might have wanted earlier in their lives. All administrators believed that there was some room for improvement in communication between head office and the staff, but generally they were willing to acknowledge that their superiors were making commendable attempts.

Themes

In the previous section of this chapter I have attempted to analyze the data in relation to specific questions designed to explore the perceptions which mid-career male educational administrators hold of themselves and of their careers. This factual recording of their perceptions may be valid but does not necessarily reveal what Van Manen (1984) calls the "essence" of being a mid-career male administrator:

> The understanding of some phenomenon, some lived experience, is not fulfilled in a reflective grasp of the facticity of this or that particular experience. Rather, a true thinking on lived experience is a thoughtful, reflective grasping of what it is that renders this or that particular experience its special significance. (pp. 40-41).

What does it mean to be an adult male educator at the mid-point of one's life and career? How does this particular stage differ from other significant stages of development such as adolescence or early adulthood? I accept the responses of the participants as factual. However, a further examination of the data was conducted to search for common themes that bind together the unique characteristics of a mid-career male educator. Van Manen (1984) offers the following guidance for this approach:

> Phenomenological research consists of reflectively bringing into nearness that which tends to be obscure, that which tends to evade the intelligibility of our natural attitude of everyday life. About any experience or activity, whether it be mothering, fathering, reading,

> running, teaching, testing, lending, drawing, driving, or the experience of time, space, things, the body, others, we can reflectively ask, what is it that makes this lived experience what it is? (p. 41).

When I approached the data with this objective I discovered that there are some common themes that emerged. I wish to discuss three of these themes that I believe contribute to the uniqueness of being a mid-career male educational administrator. I have labelled these themes Importance of Time, In Service for Others, and The Need to Talk.

Importance of Time

For male administrators at this stage of life and career, time appears to take on special significance. For the administrators in the study, the recognition of the importance of time was expressed in a variety of ways. For some it represented a resource that should not be wasted. Others believed that their reflection on their lives to this stage also meant planning for the time left in their lives. There were comments about troubled or confused "times" in their lives, from administrators well into their middle adulthood stage, who could now identify that they had experienced a mid-life transition. The discussion of time was often expressed as "time for..." or "time to..." referring to time for reflection, time to plan, time to acknowledge, time to accept, or time to change. The discussion of time by these administrators at this stage of their lives took on the characteristics of a special resource that required careful utilization and consideration.

All the administrators appeared to recognize that time no longer was as limitless as it may have appeared to them in their younger adulthood stage. Bob's reference that no longer was he going towards the middle but was now going "in the other direction", seemed to signal for him that he would have to consider his future carefully in relation to what he perceived as the time he had left. For Allan, time was a commodity that demanded wise and frugal use. It was a gift that must be carefully spent for the betterment of one's self and for the people (students) one serves. Allan had some difficulty with colleagues who did not use their time away from the school for some form of professional growth. Charles and David reviewed their time remaining as a final opportunity to achieve certain objectives in their personal and professional lives. Charles was concerned that he might come to the end of his career and not have experienced certain positions in his profession for which he felt qualified. The suggestion here was that at this stage of his life, time might not be the ally to achieve goals that it previously had been.

David was less concerned about the amount of time left as he was about choosing what he actually wanted to do. He believed he was really at a crossroads in his life, and was considering a number of options within and outside the educational profession. David's consideration of time was linked to making the best choice. He recognized that at this stage if he chose incorrectly he might not have time to return to other options he had rejected.

Eric and Frank were contemplating their retirement in the near future and used this particular time to make peace with themselves and their careers. Both admitted that earlier aspirations had not been realized for them, but they had come to the conclusion that overall, they had had productive and

satisfying careers. Frank admitted that if he had pushed himself a little harder he could have done more, but he was happy with his life and had no major regrets. The time remaining would still offer opportunities for him to be of service. Eric had come to accept that he would not become a millionaire and was therefore going to extract every bit of satisfaction from what he was doing which, he felt, had afforded him a good living. At this point in their lives, all administrators accepted the fact that the time remaining was less than they had already enjoyed and they were attempting to plan wisely for its future use.

In Service of Others

A second and equally powerful theme that emerges from the research is the existence of a common raison d'etre of all the administrators, that of their commitment to the idea of service to others. The theme of service to others was expressed more than once by all the administrators. The students, teachers and parents that they served on a daily basis were the very reason for their existence as administrators.

This theme was expressed in a forceful manner, particularly by Charles, who suggested that anyone who could not come to work every day and interact in a positive way with the students should get out of education. David considered the educator as the ultimate care-giver in the example of the "Master Teacher" and, for him, there was no higher calling. While some of the administrators worried about the expanding role of non-education agencies, such as social services, in the schools, David saw it as an opportunity to expand the school role in caring for the whole child. For

Allan, the ultimate joy was to light an intellectual fire under his students and watch them blossom. He admitted, however, that he was seeing fewer of these "fires" in recent years and was convinced that our materialistic society was having an adverse effect on our young people. Allan would only consider other administrative positions if he could retain his contact with the students. If a choice had to be made, he would elect in favour of the students. Eric also felt a deep responsibility towards his students, especially in the area of helping them come to grips with what must be for many of them a very confusing and contradictory society. He wanted to tell them that there are ways to avoid the pitfalls and that you can find happiness and fulfillment without alcohol, drugs or promiscuity. Eric believed this was his principal role and helping these children through difficult times was a great source of satisfaction for him.

The service to others theme also emerged as the administrators projected their lives into retirement. They offered descriptions of their lives that would revolve around activities directed towards others. Allan, Eric and Frank were particularly certain that when they left their present careers, they would be involved in people-oriented pursuits. Allan and Eric saw a role for themselves as lay ministers in their church. Both believed that the experiences they will have had and the training they will have taken will be very useful to their communities. They felt that it was not only right that they should pursue such a course, but that they had an obligation to help less fortunate people. Frank was studying Spanish with the thought of giving service to a third world country with an organization such as C.U.S.O. For these administrators there was a realization that their existence was based on a dedication of self to the service of others.

The Need to Talk

Throughout the research on this work, especially during the interview stage, I was struck by the totally unfettered manner in which the administrators were willing to share their thoughts about the questions I was asking. Occasionally the responses became quite personal and I felt flattered that they would share so much, even with my assurances of confidentiality and anonymity. A closer examination of my experience during the interviews reveals that the role of an administrator sometimes places him in a unique position between the superintendent and the staff which may result in a feeling of isolation. The consequence of this isolation is that he is not often asked, or feels he is not often asked, for his thoughts on issues. Administrators expressed several times that they would like to be consulted more often on educational matters. Furthermore, there was some frustration expressed regarding decisions made that neither conformed to policy nor seemed to be in the best interest of the system.

The administrators also expressed a keen interest in the research I had undertaken, and welcomed without hesitation the opportunity to offer their thoughts. It may be that an opportunity to share their opinions or experiences on educational or personal matters was so rare that they seized the chance when it presented itself. All the administrators expressed a desire to be listened to more often. They also indicated that they felt that the study I was doing was overdue and should be expanded and ongoing. They recommended that a study into mid-life educators should include teachers as well as administrators, and believed that the reflective requirements of the questions

asked would be helpful in understanding one another. There seemed to be a desire to know what their colleagues were saying about the topic of perceptions, as if this would help them achieve some reassurance for their own views, as well as insights into the views of others.

There was a very strong indication that these administrators had not thought about their perceptions of themselves and their careers for many years, if at all, and appreciated the opportunity to verbalize their thoughts. The desire to "talk" and to be "listened to " emerged clearly as a significant theme throughout the research.

Chapter 4

OVERVIEW AND REFLECTIONS

This chapter will present the following information divided as follows:

I. An Overview

In this section the reason for the work is re-stated as well as a brief summary of the methodology. This will be followed by an overview of the findings that I have determined are significant.

II. Findings As They Relate to Literature

This section is sub-divided in order to make a comparison with the findings relative to current literature, and there is a subsection which will compare the findings as they relate to the work of Daniel Levinson.

III. Personal Reflections

To bring the work to its conclusion I offer some personal reflections of the experience I have had in undertaking this work and I offer some personal thoughts of being a mid-career male educational administrator.

Overview

The basis of this study came from the following question: What are the perceptions which mid-career male educational administrators hold of themselves and of their careers? In the search to answer this question five additional questions were used to assist me in my work:

a) How do mid-career educational administrators perceive their present positions?

b) How have mid-career educational administrators changed their perceptions of their careers since first entering their profession?

c) Does the school system in which they work offer any special support to administrators during their mid-career transition?

d) What perceptions do mid-career administrators have of themselves at this stage of their lives?

e) What aspect of their present adult stage causes them the most satisfaction and, conversely, the greatest frustration, both in their professional and personal lives?

Significance of the Study

I hope that by probing the insights of male mid-career educational administrators I may add useful commentary on the special needs of this segment of the education profession at a time of an aging work force.

Methodology

Through personal contact with professional educators in two separate school boards I was given permission to approach administrators to seek their participation. I found that after I had explained the nature of my work there were many who were willing to volunteer. From a list of

administrators I selected four administrators from one board and two from the second board. All who were selected were assured of confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any time. Taped interviews were conducted with each volunteer, and the typed transcripts for each interview were given to the administrators for their review and approval. Upon receipt of their concurrence with the material, permission was requested and granted to use the data in my research. Upon acceptance of my thesis all transcripts will be destroyed and all tapes erased.

Findings from the Research

To select findings that I have determined to be significant runs the risk of overlooking findings that may be important to others, especially those administrators who willingly gave of their time to be part of my research. The process of choice involved, first, the categorization of the respondents' responses as they related to the specific research questions, which are listed at the beginning of this chapter. Through interaction with the administrators and my advisor, I was able to identify categories which allowed for closer analysis. These categories were reflective of the research questions and broadly labelled: perceptions of self, recognition of system support, personal growth and change, satisfactions and frustrations.

Further consultation with the respondents and my advisor permitted me to decide that there were some mutually agreeable themes. Three of these were discussed in Chapter 2, i.e., the importance of time, in service of others, and the need to talk. According to the data, they held significance for all the

administrators and seemed to best define what it meant to be a mid-career male administrator.

Findings As They Compare to the Theories of Daniel J. Levinson

An examination of the findings from the research on mid-life adult male educational administrators when compared to the findings of Daniel Levinson reveals some very significant similarities. Even though Levinson's subjects were drawn from occupational groupings that did not include the education field, there is evidence that the experiences of his subjects are similar to those of the educators in this work.

Mid-Life Transition

Before a man can enter his next adult stage he must pass through a transitional stage which lasts approximately five years. According to Levinson this period begins in a man's late thirties and must end at around age 45. Like other transitional periods (i.e., early adulthood transition, age 17 to 22) the primary function is to terminate the previous adult stage, in this case early adulthood, and begin preparation for his next full adult stage, which would be middle adulthood. This transitional period offers the person experiencing the transition a period of time in which to assess his life to this point and to begin to think about his remaining years. The fact that his remaining years may be less in number than those he has already enjoyed makes this particular exercise all the more important.

Unlike his early adulthood transition and subsequent early adulthood stage, mistakes in choices now may not have the same benefit of time in which to make corrections. Consequently there is a need to be more precise in his choices for the future. Levinson in his study of male adult life at the mid-life stage, found that the transitional period was the most important one to be encountered by his subjects. As a result he believed that the degree to which men dealt with the tasks they faced during this period would determine how well they enjoyed their remaining years. Levinson (1978) determined that, in order for a man to successfully negotiate this transition, there were three main tasks he must confront:

> One task is to terminate the era of early adulthood. He has to review his life in this era and reappraise what he has done with it.... A second task is to take his first steps toward the initiation of middle adulthood. Although he is not yet ready to start building a new life structure, he can begin to modify the negative elements of the present structure and to test new choices... A third task is to deal with the polarities that are the sources of deep division in his life. (pp. 191-192)

I will proceed to examine each of these tasks and compare them to the data gathered from the mid-career educators in my study.

Terminating the Past

Upon reaching the mid-point in one's life the principal concern that a man must deal with, according to Levinson (1978), is: "What have I done

with my life? What do I really get from and give to my wife, children, friends, work, community and self?" (p. 192). This questioning of his present life structure is necessary if he is to create a meaningful life during his remaining years. Recognizing that some administrators in this study were just experiencing their mid-life transition while others were well into their middle adulthood, it is significant to note that all saw this period as time of reflection, appraising and planning.

Eric (in middle adulthood) offered a comment very close to that of Levinson when he said that during his transition he had "a lot of discussion with [his] wife. We would discuss a number of things, especially feelings about certain things...about [his] career, about [his] family, about her. You spend a lot of time reflecting" (5-2, p. 6). Bob, on the other hand, was just experiencing his mid-life transition and he had become aware that instead of going towards the middle (of his chronological age), he was now going in the other direction, towards the end. This had caused him to give serious thought to where he wanted to be in the next few years. Charles was also coming to the realization that, according to their present "point system", he had passed his halfway point and now spent more time planning his remaining years.

In concert with this reflection on their past, the administrators also examined what they had accomplished and tried to determine if they had achieved the goals they had set for themselves. In some cases there was disappointment and, as Frank admitted, he could have done more if he had pushed himself a little harder. Bob still believed that his goal of becoming a principal was possible even if the timing was off from his original estimate. David and Eric had considered earlier in their careers, the possibility of

moving into a more senior position such as a superintendency, but no longer felt the need for such advancement. They had, to some degree, dealt with their earlier perceptions of what was important in their lives and careers and now realized that those positions were not really for them.

Levinson noted that this process of disillusionment is characteristic of the mid-life transition and an important step in the process of accepting oneself. Although Bob, the youngest of the administrators, had not given up on his goal for advancement, other administrators such as Eric, David and Frank became more content with their lot in life. At this point Eric decided that he was going to extract as much satisfaction as he could from what he was doing and not worry about things that were not likely to happen. As Levinson (1978) notes:

> The process of losing or reducing illusion involves diverse feelings - disappointment, joy, relief, bitterness, grief, wonder, freedom - and has diverse outcomes. A man may feel bereft and have the experience of suffering an irreparable loss. He may also feel liberated, free to develop more flexible values and to admire others in a more genuine, less idealizing way. (p. 193)

For the educators in this study the transitional period was used in a similar way as found in Levinson's research.

Modifying the Life Structure

According to Levinson, the second major task of the mid-life transition is to begin to modify the present life structure and begin planning the structure that will carry a man through his middle adult years. This is also a very important task in that this may be the last real chance he has to correct or eliminate certain aspects of his present structure that he feels are at odds with his goals in life. Every aspect of his structure is now questioned, his career, his family, his values.

Modifying a life structure can be very simple for some, while others experience great turmoil resulting in dramatic changes. In this latter case, according to Levinson, the more turbulent the attack on the present life structure, the more likely is the individual to experience a crisis. In these cases it is not uncommon for a person to decide to change careers or to dissolve a perceived troubled marriage. Others who are more accepting of their lives to this point are less prone to crisis and experience only a period of confusion and disorientation until they decide in which direction they wish to proceed.

Regardless of the experience, once they make decisions on their future life structure the transitional period comes to an end and they begin their middle adulthood stage. For the administrators in this study this period of transition was, in the worst cases, a time of significant confusion. David and Eric recalled periods earlier in their mid-life stage when everything was questioned. They had contemplated leaving the profession for what they perceived were greener pastures. Through the support of family, friends and

colleagues they gradually came to a point where they realized that what they were doing was worthwhile and that, by accepting their lot in life, they could still gain a great deal of satisfaction from their work. David still did not rule out the possibility of trying other careers but, for the present, he believed that he would be content to stay where he was. Eric was closer to retirement and very much at peace with himself. He derived a great deal of satisfaction from what he was doing. Allan had also passed through his mid-life transition with apparent ease and was content to focus his energies on promoting excellence among his students. At this point he was completely happy with what he was doing and anticipated many more years of the same. Bob was not yet through his transition and was in the middle of his self-examination at the time of the interviews. He still believed his skills would justify promotion and that, given the chance, he could really make a difference. He had not yet completely decided on what changes he would make to his life structure, other than a change in his timetable for promotion. He would still need a few more years in which to experience his transitional phase before joining the other administrators who had learned to be more accepting of themselves.

Dealing With Conflicting Polarities

The third major task associated with the mid-life transition as Levinson concludes, is a man's need to deal with the process of individuation. Levinson defines this term as "the changes in a person's relationship to himself and to his external world" (p. 195). From birth we are constantly adjusting personal boundaries between ourselves and the world with which we interact. At birth we begin a separate existence from mother, yet remain dependent on her for nourishment and protection. As we grow older our

boundaries change and expand. Crossing a street alone for the first time, a first trip alone to visit relatives or friends - these become a part of our changing relationship with our world and ourselves. The process of ongoing individuation is particularly significant during the mid-life stage and demands that the individual deal with some very special tasks. Levinson identified four tasks or "conflicting polarities" that require resolution if the process of individuation is to proceed properly. He labels the polarities a) Young/Old, b) Destruction/Creation, c) Masculine/Feminine and d) Attachment/Separateness.

Young/Old

According to Levinson the arrival at the mid-point of one's life creates some special concerns. In addition to the reduction of years remaining there is also a realization that the body experiences diminishing capacities. Lessened physical endurance, reduction in stamina or the need for eyeglasses may signal to the individual that the body he possesses, and once thought invincible, is beginning to wear down. No longer is he the young man still seeking the approval of older colleagues. He is now one of the older colleagues. As a person reflects on these changes, he soon discovers that he must make certain choices. If he tries to "remain young" he runs the risk of being rejected or ridiculed; but he does not wish to identify totally with the old as that is an admission that the end is approaching.

For the administrators in his study the Young/Old polarity did not appear to cause significant stress. In fact, with the exception of Bob, each seemed to be quite satisfied with his chronological stage and was quite

realistic about his status as the "older person" on staff. Levinson found in his work that stress and depression were not uncommon among the people he interviewed. In the worst cases the view taken by some of his research subjects was that: "Young is immortal, old is the brink of death" (p. 214). Those in Levinson's work who took a more pragmatic approach to resolving the Young/Old conflict asked themselves: "Can I make my life more worthwhile in the remaining years? Am I too old to make a fresh start?" (p. 217).

For most of the educators in this study the emphasis was on getting more satisfaction out of life than worrying about what could have been done. Only Bob seemed to put off his entry into the older generation as he still wanted to achieve his early adulthood goals and "make a difference". For other administrators such as Allan, Eric and Charles the realization that they were now part of the older generation caused them little concern. None of the administrators regretted significantly how their careers had proceeded, and indicated that they would change little if given the chance. It is possible that if more administrators had been interviewed, different findings may have resulted.

Destruction/Creation

During the mid-life transition of individuals, Levinson found that his subjects came to realize that within themselves there existed equal and

significant abilities for both destruction and creation. One of our most important creative powers is the shared ability to produce offspring. Other creative abilities result in works of literature and art, humanitarian contributions for the betterment of society, or scientific and medical breakthroughs that may diminish human suffering. The guidance and encouragement of students is also a creative activity. The dark side of this polarity suggests that man is also capable of horrendous deeds. An examination of history and our ability to war on one another shows that humans do not always act in the best interests of their brothers. As Levinson (1978) states:

> Homo sapiens is one of the very few species that preys on itself, engages in collective torture and individual sadism, and creates social structures in which large segments of the population are systematically deprived, oppressed, destroyed in body and soul. (p.223)

None of the administrators in this study expressed opinions that they had thought deeply about this polarity. It is significant to note, however, that at least two of them, Allan and Bob, expressed grave concerns about what they believed was very poor treatment of their colleagues. This recognition that people can deliberately hurt others caused them to reflect on their own actions and to vow that they would behave more positively. Allan was particularly concerned that some of his colleagues were not offering as much as they could to the system. Upon reflection, he wondered if this might be a result of how they felt they were being treated, and concluded that if he had been dealt with similarly, he might react in the same manner:

> But sometimes, it's the manner in which some of these people are treated in the system. They could have good reasons not to give more than they actually do. Because oftentimes, the treatment that some of them do get is, to me. totally unChristian and it's unfair. (1-1, p. 17)

Allan also recognized that the youth of today are under great pressure to submit to influences that are of little value. Society, Allan feels, is advocating a "dog eat dog" approach to life which allows little room for compassion or concern for one's fellow man. Eric also saw the pitfalls to which youth are exposed. Drugs, alcohol or promiscuous sex all offer a moment of pleasure, and potentially a lifetime of grief. He hoped that through his influence he could have a positive effect. Eric described a lesson he gave to his students:

> I said [that] we've been talking about all these horrible things that are happening all around us, but it's not happening to each one of us individually. I said: "Collectively it's happening out there, but it's only happening to certain individuals. A lot of us, it doesn't touch. But we have to know about it...because we have to avoid these things. Because basically most of us live a very happy and fulfilling life and we have to recognize that in ourselves, and we have to continually keep pumping ourselves up, having the inner confidence that we are good people, and that we can live good lives, and from that comes happiness. (5 -1, p. 17)

All the administrators expressed concern for their students and their colleagues vis a vis the destructive capabilities of human beings. For themselves, they seemed to have resolved this particular polarity of Destructive/Creative in favor of working for the betterment of all, both at present and in the future.

Masculine/Feminine

This particular polarity, according to Levinson, calls for a greater integration of the masculine and feminine abilities that exist within us, and to allow for more compatible relationships with the opposite sex. In his early childhood stage man is not fully capable of responding to his feminine traits because of societal pressure and the stereotyping of what it is to be "manly" or "womanly". The mid-life transition, however, offers men an opportunity to reflect on his relations with females and his own feelings in a more objective and mature manner. He is no longer so concerned with the approval of others and is now capable of expressing emotions and feelings that in previous stages he felt he needed to suppress. According to Levinson, as man enters the mid-life transition his reluctance to deal with the feminine aspects of his life tends to diminish and allows him to form relationships that are more productive.

In this study of mid-career administrators there was little evidence of this polarity being of particular significance. There was, however, some commentary by some administrators such as Charles, David and Eric that at this stage of their lives their relationships with their wives appeared to be more stable and rewarding than at any previous stage of adulthood. Eric was

the only administrator who described a time which he had discussed his relationship with his wife and that it had resulted in better understanding between them. Having gone through his mid-life transition, Eric found himself more understanding and sensitive to the needs of his wife. He now seemed to be able to reconcile the needs of both of them in a more mature fashion.

Attachment/Separateness

Levinson describes this particular polarity as the extent to which we are attached to our external environment and, at the same time, are withdrawn from it. We all recognize that it is difficult, if not impossible to exist without some contact with our external world. The degree to which we become attached or withdrawn will vary at different adult stages. During our Early Adulthood our desire to succeed in a particular career may require greater external contact than later in life when we feel a lesser need to achieve or impress. According to Levinson: "I am attached when I am trying to adapt to, participate in or master the external world" and "A person is separate when he is primarily involved in his inner world - a world of imagination, fantasy, play." (p. 239).

This polarity is particularly significant at the mid-life stage as its resolution will have tremendous impact on how we view our world and to what extent we will derive satisfaction. Depending upon how he evaluates his first half of life, a man may decide that he has nothing to contribute to society and will withdraw. Conversely, he may decide to re-immerse himself in his work and leave very little time for himself. The key to the resolution of this

polarity, according to Levinson (1978), is some sort of balance: "If we become too separate, our contact with the world is lost and our capacity for survival jeopardized. If we become too attached to the environment we endanger our capacity for self-renewal, growth and creative effort."(p. 240).

Of the administrators in this study only Allan and Bob showed evidence of the balance between attachment and separateness being tipped more in one direction (attachment). Allan described himself as a workaholic who had, on occasion, arrived at school only to discover it was a Saturday. His criteria for time well-spent away from the school was that one should be engaged in something that would be professionally beneficial. Allan made no apologies for this and expressed the view that his work was his satisfaction.

Bob was continuing to pursue his goal of advancement and would probably need a few more years in which to achieve more of a balance. Deeply immersed in the work of his school, he drew great satisfaction from what he perceived as significant achievement involving students, teachers and programs.

Charles, David and Eric made what they believed were important contributions to their profession but did not feel that their work world should be their sole reason for existence. All expressed interest in activities beyond the walls of the school where they could, as David says: "get [my] hands dirty and feel good" or, as in Eric's view, that his wood-working hobby was good for "the cleansing of the soul."

In striking this balance between attachment and separateness, Levinson (1978) says that a man "can draw more upon his inner resources and is thus less dependent on external stimulation. He enjoys solitude more, since he has internal company when others are absent" (p. 242). For four of the administrators the findings suggest that a satisfactory balance had been achieved and they were quite content with their lives. Only Bob and Allan showed evidence that their careers were still the predominant force in their lives, but there was no evidence that this imbalance was a cause for concern.

Summary

The findings of Levinson in his study of male adults experiencing mid-life transition appear to be applicable to mid-life male educators, according to the evidence from the data of this work. There were some areas of Levinson's findings which were more obvious than others, but generally one can find many similarities. In none of the cases in this study were there any of the extreme cases of crisis as described by Levinson. This could be attributed to the limited number of administrators interviewed, the structure of the research, or may simply signify that the education profession attracts a particular type of person who exhibits certain gifts or skills.

Findings As They Relate To Other Literature

Lack of Research In the Area of Adult Development

One of the primary findings from the data suggests that there has been insufficient research done in the field of adult development. Most of the

administrators in this study believed that the work done in the area of adult development was insufficient for their needs. All hoped that there will be more research done in this field. They agreed that a better understanding of adult development would lead to a more just and efficient deployment of personnel.

David was particularly enthusiastic about this study as he felt that the more that is understood about the stages that adults go through, the better able is society to help those who experience difficulty. Eric also saw some changes that he felt were positive in the field of personnel administration. He noted that today's adults who experience a difficulty are far more likely to find agencies which offer support than may have been available in previous years. Eric's example of this is treatment offered for alcoholism, which was virtually non-existent a few years ago, and would likely have been simply a cause for the dismissal of an employee. At the same time, Eric believed there is much more work to be done in the field of adult development to ensure that people are dealt with in a fair and just manner. Allan and Bob remarked that they believed that many of their colleagues were not being treated fairly, and thought that there is a greater need for understanding and sensitivity to individual needs.

When the literature is examined to find reasons for this lack of research in the field of adult development a number of theories are offered. Prior to the middle of the twentieth century little work was done in this field primarily because it was widely believed that little happened during our adult years. Roger Gould (1975) offers this analogy:

> Like a butterfly an adult is supposed to emerge fully formed, and on cue, after a succession of developmental changes in childhood. Equipped with all the accoutrements, such as wisdom and rationality, the adult supposedly remains quiescent for another half century or so. While children change, adults age. (p. 78)

Hingley (1984) notes in his literature review that it was only at the beginning of this century that "adolescence was defined as a separate stage of growth" (p. 7).

Even with the recognition that development and change does take place during our adult years many researchers found it was not easy to gather accurate information about adults. Erikson (1968) found that: "The observer of life is always immersed in it and thus unable to transcend the limited perspective of his stage and condition" (p. 597). Sheehy (1974), also noting the apparent void in this field, offered the following observation:

> It's far easier to study adolescents and aging people. Both groups are in institutions (schools or rest homes) where they make captive subjects. The rest of us are out there in the mainstream of a spinning and distracted society, trying to make some sense of our one and only voyage through its ambiguities. (p. 10)

A third perspective on why researchers may still have difficulty gathering accurate data is offered by Levinson (1978): "the wish to learn more about the possibilities of personal growth is hampered by the fear that careful scrutiny will reveal only decline and restriction" (p.ix).

In more recent years researchers in this field, such as Riley (1986), Cohen (1987) and Datan et al (1987), have found that the study of adult development must expand its parameters to include all disciplines if we are to understand adequately what happens to adults as they age. As Riley noted, adults "do not age in laboratories. They age in highly complex and changing societies and social institutions" (p. 172). Cohen's study of specific social milestones, i.e., birth, marriage and death, and Datan's work in the area of career transitions, suggest other sources of data we may investigate if we wish to arrive at a clearer understanding of adult development.

Transitions Are Not Always Crises

A second major finding of this study of adult male educational administrators appears to be that there was little to confirm that any of them experienced a crisis in its most negative form. For those administrators such as Eric or David, who identified that they had gone through a mid-life crisis, their descriptions were far less turbulent than those offered in some literature. For Frank, Allan and Charles there was some recognition of change but none offered any evidence of major disruption in their lives. Bob was just at the age of his mid-life transition and was not yet in a position to fully describe the impact of reaching middle adulthood.

The literature does suggest that many adults can pass through their mid-life transition and enter adulthood without experiencing a crisis. Sheehy (1974) does not subscribe to the use of the word "crisis", but called the transition stages "passages". In her work she found that many of her subjects

responded: "What about me? I didn't have a crisis" (p. 16). If I had interviewed more administrators, there may have been examples of the extreme cases of difficult transitions. For the administrators who participated, however, there is little evidence of crisis.

Recent literature in the field of adult development offers some positive possibilities as man enters his middle years. Schlossberg (1987) suggested: "By systematically sizing up transitions and our resources for dealing with them we can learn how to build on our strengths, cut our losses - and even grow in the process" (p. 57). From the data we see evidence that Eric has come to recognize his limitations, has decided that he has a lot to be thankful for and that there is an opportunity to reap a fair amount of satisfaction from what he is doing. David is another administrator who is quite content to be doing what he is doing and no longer has aspirations for higher positions. Both of these men were the only ones in the study who specifically acknowledged that they felt they had experienced a mid-life transition. In their cases, it was more a period of questioning of self than a major disruption in their adult lives. Their changing perspectives of where they placed themselves in relation to their careers and lifestyles seem to be supported by Rosenfeld and Stark (1987) who concluded:

> What seems to mark our adult years most is our shifting perspective on ourselves and our world - who we think we are, what we expect to get done, our timetable for doing it and our satisfaction with what we have accomplished. (p. 64)

The key to a successful transition into middle adulthood appears to be the degree to which we can accept the actions and accomplishments of the first half of our lives. For the administrators of this study, except for Bob, there appears to be strong evidence that they had passed into the Middle Adulthood years with a minimum of difficulty. A follow-up interview with Bob after he has completed his transitional stage might prove useful, but was not possible for this work.

Transitions Are Unique Personal Experiences

There is some evidence that all males who make the transition from early adulthood to middle adulthood will encounter similar experiences. That is to say that we all must face the fact that we have reached the mid-point (chronologically) of our lives, that we all experience some degree of decline in our physical capabilities, and we all begin to consider our future with greater attention. If, however, we view man at a given point of his life as a sum total of his various life experiences (social, economical, biological, psychological) we should not be surprised that, faced with a particular choice, he will not always respond in exactly the same way as another person in a similar situation. Schlossberg (1987) found: "Clearly people differ in how they cope with what seems to be the same transition and often cope well in one transition but feel ineffective in the next" (p. 75).

Allan has decided to use his Middle Adult years to pursue post secondary studies as a way of both meeting the demands of his present position, as well as preparing for work after leaving the education field. Eric, on the other hand, is quite happy with where he is professionally and is

quite happy to generate as much satisfaction as possible from his present position. David has entered his middle adulthood stage with what appears to be a renewed vigour. His experiences to date have been examined and he feels quite satisfied with what he has accomplished. While content with his present position, he has thoughts of attempting other endeavors within his profession as well as outside of teaching.

The reactions to mid-life by these administrators present both similarities and differences. While one may experience similar events or milestones as someone else, the reactions will differ as a person bases his choices on his perceptions of what he can or cannot do.

Summary

Other literature in the field of adult development suggests that the emphasis by some of the early investigations on a crisis occurring at mid-life may be an exaggeration. Certainly there is much evidence to demonstrate that many people can and do go through some very difficult times. There is equal evidence, however (Sheehy, 1974; Schlossberg, 1987), that far more people pass into their middle adulthood with very little disruption. In fact this particular stage represents an opportunity for growth that wasn't possible in the earlier years. There also appears to be a need for more work in this field to enable society to be more understanding of adults as they pass into the second half of their lives. Fear of declining abilities, both mental and physical, may cause people great anxiety. However, once a person has come to accept himself for what he is, and acknowledges his true capabilities, he may become freer to make very meaningful contributions.

Personal Reflections

The Research

This work attempts to answer the question: "What are the perceptions which mid-career male educational administrators hold of themselves and of their careers?" In the search for an answer to this question semi-structured interviews were conducted with six male educators between the ages of 35 and 50, who were school administrators in the Province of Alberta. An extensive literature search was also conducted to acquaint myself with what had been found by other researchers in the field.

Why This Work?

In March of 1987 I had entered a period of my life which caused me a great deal of stress and apprehension. I was 42 years of age, married with a young family, and for the first time in my life was without a job. After 20 years of public service in a variety of positions and with what may be described as significant success, I was faced with a situation in which I perceived I was not wanted nor needed. Suffice to say, this type of experience does little for one's self-esteem.

For a period of three months I contemplated my situation and explored various options. The one I finally chose was to return to university and begin

post-graduate work in educational administration. Looking back, I feel that something more was happening to me which I could not clearly identify at the time. Changes were taking place within me, as well as changes from a career perspective. I began to look at things differently than I had a few years earlier, and contemplating my future became a much different exercise than it was when I was "younger."

During the course of my graduate program I searched for a suitable topic for my thesis work. It was during this search that I came upon the work of Daniel J. Levinson, and specifically his book, "Seasons of A Man's Life". It soon became evident to me that Levinson was not just talking about 40 middle-aged men who were describing their mid-life experiences, he was talking about me. Further investigation revealed that the study of adult development, particularly middle adulthood, was only recently being tackled. I determined that, given my age and career stage, there could be no better field in which to do my work. Little did I realize the difficulty such an undertaking would create.

Difficulties of Research Into Mid-Life Adulthood

As I began my research I was hopeful that in studying the lives of other mid-life adults I would become more knowledgeable about myself and understand a little more clearly what I was experiencing. Like Levinson's subjects I had entered (unrecognized at the time) my mid-life transition. The loss of employment created the necessity and opportunity for self-examination which may not have occurred if I had continued with other occupational options. In this regard, I feel fortunate that I had a chance to

reflect on my life and better define the perception of who I am, where I have been, and where I want to go.

The difficulty of this study arises because of the tremendous personal involvement that occurs when a person such as myself, at my stage, attempts such an undertaking. If I were thirty years of age the data collected would have less relevance to me as I could not identify as easily with the experiences of the administrators in the study. I also feel that if I were fifty years old I would again be viewing the data as one who might be understanding, yet detached. To study people who are going through similar experiences as one is presently encountering may create a conflict of interest that could overshadow the contribution of the respondents. Furthermore the mid-life transitional period with all its confusion, self-doubt, regret for one's past, and fear for the future, may also prevent one from being as objective as is necessary. This constant personalization of the topic has created problems that manifest themselves in the inability to articulate on paper what I truly feel. For me there is still the difficulty of expressing in writing for all to see, the innermost fears, the wildest dreams, and the most glaring failures of my first 40 years.

I have great admiration for the administrators who participated in this study, for the openness with which they communicated to me. At times the personal glimpses of their lives was very touching and, I assume, were offered only with the understanding that confidentiality would be maintained. I intend to honour that commitment.

What I Have Learned

There are several important things that I have learned from this research that I believe will be of benefit to me and, hopefully, to others. The data and literature clearly suggest and confirm that many people experience a period of confusion, uncertainty and even instability at the mid-point of their lives. There are also instances of very severe crises for some who have difficulty entering the second half of their lives. There are also examples of many who "sail" through this period with little or no difficulty. What this suggests is that each of these scenarios are normal for a man contemplating the second half of his life. A person approaching his mid-life transition would be well served by this knowledge, and with support and counselling might avoid the more extreme disruptions that have been noted in some of the literature. I am now, at age 45, able to reflect on my transitional period and say that, for me, the experience was far less traumatic than it could have been. When faced with declining years, loss of some physical capabilities, and a recognition that one is no longer part of the "young adult" group, there is every chance that confidence can give way to the self-pity and recrimination over perceived failures which serves no purpose.

Another important lesson that this exercise offers is the importance of talking about your experiences with others. Without exception, the administrators were genuinely pleased that someone would take the time to listen to what they had to say. With confidentiality and anonymity offered to them, they were quite candid about their lives at this stage of their careers. There was also some suggestion that if this type of work was attempted more often, the results would have beneficial effects on the profession. The

understanding of how people perceive themselves and their careers at different stages of their lives could make personnel management more efficient and productive. As Bridges (1980) noted:

> Regardless of what is changing in a person's life - marital status, health, financial or spiritual beliefs - work is affected. Sometimes the change intensifies a person's energy, but more often it diverts energy from work to that area of the person's life that is changing. (p. 75).

By creating a system whereby people are encouraged in a non-threatening way to talk about themselves, society may prevent some of the very serious problems that are sometimes associated with mid-life transitions.

A third lesson that I have learned from this exercise is that there can be a meaningful life after forty! Eric seemed to me to be the one who best expressed this thought. Having come to accept his status in life he was determined to make every effort to extract as much satisfaction from what he was doing. This satisfaction did not mean only that he was going to take, but that he would use his experiences and skills to help others (students and teachers) achieve their goals. Eric recognized that in giving of himself he would also receive. Clearly Eric had opted for generativity over stagnation as described by Erikson, as one of the adult stages of development.

There is a danger at this stage of our lives to judge ourselves too harshly or to be so guilt-ridden by our youthful failures that we withdraw from society. In doing so we fail to recognize that we still have something to

offer. When we look at the world and see only prejudice, famine and war, and fail to see beauty and love, withdrawal seems to be a viable option. In writing about this Levinson (1978) states: "The great developmental task of this era is not to retire early from worldly responsibilities, or to try vainly to free oneself from all passion and destructiveness, but to seek a new balance of power and love," (p. 228). The message is clear. We do not give up; we keep trying.

The last lesson on which I wish to comment (there could be many more) is the fact that we need to reflect on our own lives more often. By reflection, I mean that as individuals we should take the time to think about ourselves so that we may more freely appreciate who we are, what we have done, and where we would like to go. I do not mean that we should daydream or fantasize, but rather try to come to as clear and objective an understanding of ourselves as we are able. This is particularly important in areas where we believe we have failed. Too often a failure, an objective or a goal not achieved, creates barriers that prevent us from going on. In some severe cases there is every attempt to avoid even the recognition of what we have done, or failed to do. Such action creates further difficulties. We must face the past so that we avoid making the same mistakes in the future. Naomi Golan (1986) says: "Sometimes you have to remember in order to put it behind you" (p. 218). If we resist reflection and acceptance, our failures will frustrate future endeavors.

Future Work

The data and literature suggest that much more should be done in the field of adult development. It is only recently that we have been able to conclude that there are significant changes experienced by adults as they go through life. I cannot help but reflect on the age old battle that goes on between parents and their children. As the child passes through his various stages there is often the cry that his parents don't understand him. The young teenager is bombarded with pressures, often conflicting, from peers, family and teachers. His body is changing and he faces numerous challenges. Unfortunately little thought is given to the fact that his parents may also be undergoing significant changes which have implications on their relationships with their offspring. Is a teenage son's experience with puberty any less stressful than his father's encounter with mid-life? Perhaps a deeper understanding of both experiences might prove beneficial to all.

Concluding Comment

This thesis topic and its related work and research has been a most difficult undertaking. I sometimes felt that I did not interview six adult male educators as much as I was seeking personal reassurances of my own perspective.

Erich Segal, in his 1985 novel, "The Class", aptly defined the focal point for everyone who passes through the mid-point of their lives when he wrote: "They knew they had suffered the irreparable loss of what was once

their most precious gift. Their youth."(p. 515). If we can face that and accept the loss we can go on. Youth most certainly cannot be retrieved. Therefore we should celebrate our victories of youth, acknowledge our defeats, and get on with making the contribution we were all destined to make.

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APPENDIX 1

Sample letter to Board Superintendent:

12233 134th St.
Edmonton,

Alberta

T5L 1T8.
March 7, 1988.

Dear Mr. _____:

I am a graduate student at the University of Alberta working towards a Masters in Educational Administration. I am writing to you to seek your assistance and approval to approach a small number of professional staff in your system to take part in interviews relative to my thesis topic.

The topic that I have chosen for my thesis is: the perceptions mid-career administrators have of themselves and their careers. I wish to conduct tape interviews with five male mid-career administrators between the ages of 35 and 50. There will be two interviews, each lasting approximately 45 minutes. Confidentiality and anonymity of the data collected will be assured. Respondents will be given transcripts of their interviews for clarification and corrections and no data will be used without their expressed consent.

It is my intention to conduct the interviews during April and May. The time and place of the interview will be mutually agreed to with the respondents and in a manner that will minimize disruptions to their schedules.

Information or clarification regarding my work may be obtained by contacting my faculty advisor, Dr. Margaret Haughey, at 432-3792. For additional information I can be reached at 455-9063 (home) or at 432-4973(university).

Sincerely,

Joseph F. MacEachern

APPENDIX 2

Sample letter to administrators:

12233 134 Street
Edmonton, Alberta.
T5L 1T8
April 6, 1988.

Dear _____:

I want to thank you for agreeing to help me with my research in conjunction with my Master of Education program. As promised, I am confirming in writing the significant points we covered in our recent telephone conversation.

I have received permission from your central office to approach you, and they have been advised of your willingness to participate. Final reports and the thesis document will have no personal reference to you, your school or district. Once my thesis has been accepted and defended, all tapes will be erased, and notes and working papers will be destroyed. After each taping, a transcript of your interview will be given to you so that corrections which you think appropriate may be made. By adhering to these points I hope to assure you of complete confidentiality and anonymity.

If you would like further clarification regarding my work feel free to contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Margaret Haughey, at 432-3792. If you have any questions for myself I can be reached at home (455-9063) or at the university (432-4973).

I look forward to meeting with you.

Sincerely,

Joe MacEachern

APPENDIX 3

Sample of log entry for April 20th, 1988.:

(Any entries which may identify the administrator have been deleted.)

_____ interview, April 20th 1988. _____ School.
_____(Address of school)
_____(Phone).

Left at 8.20 to allow extra time.
Arrived at school at 9.05.
Receptionist very friendly. Got me a coffee.
Noticed that _____. Very modern school 198_.
David was first principal.

Staff members have recently experienced some personal tragedies.

Notes about personal details of David's experience, etc..
_____
_____

Impressions; Articulate,Confident Satisfied, and has many things he wants to do before he retires.
Level of security relates to independence.

I Should explore politics, Mentoring and teacher frustration. What could be done

Takes about40 minutes in moderate traffic.

APPENDIX 4

Sample of transcript with David:

Joe: Why don't you just express some of the thoughts you were expressing before I turned the tape on, in terms of changes in careers, that you were talking about, in terms of why, and so forth.

David: The reason I...I think what I went through in terms of getting out of teaching in 19__ because of finances, because of frustrations dealing with superiors...I think one of the big things about me is I like kids, and when I saw the frustrations of, in a small town, the frustrations of working with children, and their situations, and being frustrated by people from above, by bosses, I got out...out of the education business, and I think it was the best decision I ever made. Because then moving into private industry, I got a look at the real world, in terms of the management skills, because I moved into, virtually, a management position in a public relations aspect. That gave me tremendous gains, I think, because in private industry, as you know, you're sent away on management courses that are real. You become much more proficient in dealing with personnel, because that's part of the ballgame in private industry. I think that the public relations aspect that I was in helped me in terms of dealing with people, and speaking to people, in learning techniques of how to handle people. Then when I went back in, in the seventies, the finances in education had improved, and I'll go on record as saying teachers are relatively well-paid in this province, and I think that has created a strength in me. Without a shadow of a doubt if I were to identify my major strength it is in the handling of people, and it is in the public relations aspect. I believe that's one of the reasons why I was asked, ...